

Contact Lens Care

Contact lenses can be used instead of eye glasses to correct refractive errors of vision. Most people have success with contact lenses if they use and care for their contacts correctly. Contact lenses must be inserted, removed, cleaned and stored in ways that protect against eye damage and infection.

Contact lenses can be made of rigid plastic or a soft gel-like material. One lens is put into each eye and sits on the tear film that coats the cornea, the curved front surface of the eye. It is important to have contact lenses prescribed, fitted and regularly checked by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Types of contact lenses

Rigid contact lenses (also called rigid, gas-permeable or RGP lenses) are firmly shaped lenses. They are more durable than soft lenses, so they do not need to be replaced as often. Rigid lenses may be more suitable than soft lenses for some vision problems.

Soft contact lenses are flexible lenses that conform to the shape of the eye.

They are more comfortable than rigid lenses and so are generally easier to get used to. They are also larger than rigid lenses and tend to stay in place in the eye better.

There are different types of rigid and soft contact lenses, which cater for different needs and lifestyles.

They differ according to how they correct vision, their wearing schedules and their replacement schedules.

Wearing schedules

- **Daily-wear lenses** are inserted in the morning, worn through the day, and taken out at night.
- **Extended-wear lenses** allow wearers to keep their lenses in while sleeping, either occasionally or for up to 30 days. Extended-wear lenses are not suitable for everyone.

Replacement schedules

- **Conventional** lenses – rigid lenses generally need to be replaced every 1 or 2 years and conventional soft lenses after about 1 year of regular use.
- **Soft ‘frequent replacement’ (disposable) lenses** – are discarded and replaced at short intervals (e.g., daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly). Replacing lenses at short intervals can help avoid protein build up on lenses. Disposable lenses are often used by people who wear contact lenses only for sport or social occasions.

Cleaning contacts

Disposable lenses that are discarded after one use do not require cleaning, but most rigid and soft contact lenses need to be cleaned and disinfected each time they are removed from the eyes. Cleaning removes protein deposits and any other material that may have adhered to the lens. Disinfection kills microorganisms that could cause eye infections. Different types of lenses require different types of cleaning and disinfection solutions, which are available from optometrists and pharmacies. Ask your optometrist or pharmacist for advice about lens care products.

Risks with contacts

Contact lenses can cause eye irritation and abrasion and increase the risks of eye infections and ulcers. The risks of

infection and other problems are higher if lenses are worn overnight or if they are not cleaned and disinfected properly. To minimise the risks, it is important to use and clean your contact lenses as directed by your optometrist.

Eye problems caused by contact lenses can become serious very quickly. If a problem develops, stop using your lenses and see a doctor or optometrist promptly.

Self care

Ways to use contact lenses and keep your eyes healthy include:

- Have your eyes and contact lenses regularly checked by your optometrist
- Wash, rinse and dry your hands well before handling your lenses
- Follow the ‘wear schedule’ and ‘replacement schedule’ recommended by your optometrist
- Clean and disinfect your lenses using the lens care products recommended by your optometrist. Follow the directions that come with your lenses and lens care products
- Always use fresh contact lens solutions and sterile water or saline. Contact lens solution must be changed regularly, even if the lenses are not used daily
- Store your lenses in a proper storage case and rinse and dry the case after each use. Clean it thoroughly once a week. Replace your storage case regularly, at least every 3 months

- Ask an optometrist for advice about applying cosmetics and eye makeup. Don't let lotions, creams or sprays touch your lenses
- Ask an optometrist for advice before swimming or bathing while wearing contact lenses
- Use lens wetting solutions and drops to improve the comfort of your lenses in air conditioned and other dry environments. Lubricating eye drops can relieve dry eyes. Only use eye drops that are approved for use with contact lenses
- Don't instil medicated eye drops while wearing contact lenses. Ask an optometrist for advice
- Don't use tap water, bottled water or homemade saline solutions on contact lenses or the lens case
- Don't put contact lenses in your mouth or moisten them with saliva
- Don't share contact lenses with others
- Don't smoke. Smoking can increase the risk of corneal infection.

Important

- Stop using your contact lenses and consult a doctor or optometrist promptly if you have:
 - Eye discomfort or pain
 - Continuous excess tear production
 - Eye redness
 - Sensitivity to light
 - Itching, burning, or gritty feelings in an eye
 - Blurred vision
 - Swelling in or around the eyes
 - Discharge from an eye.

If an eye is injured while wearing a contact lens, the lens should be removed by a trained health professional.

- NEVER sleep with your contact lenses in unless your optometrist has specifically advised that you can. Sleeping in the wrong type of lenses can cut off the oxygen supply to your cornea, causing severe inflammation and possibly permanent damage.

For more information

An optometrist

Listed under 'O' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Optometrists Association Australia

Website: www.optometrists.asn.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.*

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: