

Handling and care of RGP contact lenses

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about Rigid Gas Permeable (RGP) contact lenses, how to insert the lenses and the care and cleaning needed.

What are RGP lenses?

RGP lenses are small hard contact lenses designed to sit on the central part of your eye (the cornea).

You should always wash your hands before handling your contact lenses and follow the instructions for handling, lens care and lens wear given by your optometrist.

Inserting the RGP lenses

When inserting your lenses, it is usually best to work over a clean surface. This will allow the lenses to be easier to find if dropped, and is unlikely to cause damage to the lens.

Some patients find using a mirror helps when inserting their contact lenses. Some patients even prefer to insert their lenses while leaning over a mirror placed flat on a level surface. You will have likely tried both techniques with your optometrist while learning to handle the lenses and found the option that suits you best.

After washing your hands, remove the lens from its case and balance on the index finger of the hand you are going to use to insert the lens, concave side up.

Most patients find it easier to hold the contact lens with the hand on the side of the eye you are about to insert the lens in to. For example, use your right hand to hold the contact lens for the right eye. The lens will be lubricated by the contact lens disinfection solution in the contact lens case.

Bring your other hand over the top of your head and use it to firmly hold up your upper eyelid.

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With the middle finger of the other hand (the hand holding the lens), pull down and hold the lower lid.

Bring the lens up to the eye and place it gently onto the cornea, the central clear window of the eye which overlaps the pupil and iris (the coloured part of the eye).

Once the lens is in place, slowly and gently release the eyelids. Try not to blink too hard as this may pop the lens out.

You can check that the lens is in place by whether or not you are able to see. If the lens has displaced, you will not be able to see. You may be able to see the lens against the white of your eye or you can feel for it. To re-centre the lens, look in the opposite direction to where it has moved, hold it in place by gently pressing on the eyelids, then look slowly back towards the lens and it should re-position.

If the lens is under the upper lid it may be necessary to look right down and move the eye from side to side, while massaging the top lid to encourage the lens to drop.

After inserting the lens(es), the lens case should be rinsed with fresh contact lens disinfecting solution and left open in the air to dry.

For details about contact lens disinfecting and comfort solutions refer to the Care Systems section below.

Removal of the lenses

There are 2 main methods for removal, you will likely have tried both with your optometrist and found the technique best suited to you. In both cases, lens removal should be done over a clean surface that will allow the lenses to be easily found if dropped. You should always wash and dry your hands before removing your lenses.

For some patients the preferred technique is to look straight ahead, hold the outer edge of the eyelids with your index finger, and bring up towards the eyebrow, keeping the eyelids pressed against the eyeball. At the same time look in the direction of your nose and blink. Essentially you are creating a 'tight blink' to pop the lens out. The lens should be dropped onto a suitable surface. Sometimes the lens can fall onto the lashes.

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Alternatively, using both index fingers, place one on the upper lid margin and one on the lower margin (where the lashes begin), then push them together (keeping them tight against the eyeball) in a pincer motion. Again, this creates a 'tight blink' which forces the lens forwards and out.

Cleaning

Lenses should be cleaned immediately after they are removed from the eye. This must be done with a suitable rigid gas permeable lens cleaner or multipurpose solution, as advised by your optometrist. A drop of this cleaner should be placed on the lens and then the lens rubbed gently, both inside and out, for about 15 to 20 seconds.

If you are using a cleaner rather than a multipurpose solution, the lens should then be rinsed thoroughly with saline before storage.

RGP lenses should be stored in an appropriate solution as recommended by your optometrist. This should be fresh solution each time you clean and store the lens(es).

After inserting the lens(es), the lens case should be emptied of solution and left open in the air to dry. The lens case should also be thoroughly washed out once a week with contact lens disinfecting solution and physically cleaned with a dedicated tooth brush.

Regular, monthly replacement of your contact lens case is essential for trouble free contact lens wear. A new case is supplied with each new bottle of disinfecting solution.

Your contact lenses should not come into contact with tap water. This is due to the high risks of potentially serious contact lens related infections associated with tap water and contact lens wear.

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Care systems

You should use the disinfection system recommended by your optometrist. Make sure that you do not use solutions beyond their expiry date, shown on the bottle. Discard solutions that have been opened longer than the recommended time marked on the bottle. As a reminder, it is useful to write on the bottle the date it was opened.

If the lenses are removed for any length of time, they should be rubbed with your contact lens cleaning solution and disinfected again before wearing.

Contact lens disinfection solutions, preservative free saline and ocular lubricants are not issued on prescription. They can be purchased from either a pharmacy, supermarket or registered online retailers.

Wearing time

- You should not wear your contact lenses for longer than has been recommended by your optometrist.
- You should not wear the lenses if your eyes are red, painful or your vision has become blurred.
- You should never sleep with your RGP lenses in place. If this happens, remove the contact lens on waking and install ocular lubricants, these can be obtained from the pharmacy. If you are concerned about your eye, contact Eye Casualty.

How to avoid problems with contact lens wear

Inappropriate contact lens wear and not following the advice of your optometrist can result in contact lens related complications, a number of which are potentially sight threatening.

To minimise problems, it is important to follow the advice of your optometrist and always wash your hands before handling your lenses.

Swimming, showering and using a jacuzzi or sauna while wearing contact lenses are all known significant risk factors for increased contact lens related complications. You should therefore avoid these risks when wearing contact lenses.

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Eye infection rates are also higher in contact lens wearers who smoke.

If your eyes are red or sore you should remove your lenses immediately. If the discomfort persists you should contact Eye Casualty for advice. The contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

It is advisable to have a pair of spectacles available that can be worn if you have any eye health complications that prevent lens wear. Spectacles can also be worn to allow your eyes to have a break from the contact lenses.

Contact information

Eye Casualty

Tel: 0300 422 3578

Available 24 hours

For general contact lens queries and ordering, please contact the:

Optometry Department

Tel: 0300 422 3190

Please leave a message with your name and telephone number and someone will get back to you.

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Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;84:379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>