

Handling and care of soft contact lenses

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about scleral contact lenses, how to insert the lenses and the care and cleaning needed.

What are soft contact lenses?

Soft contact lenses are flexible and are designed to drape across the surface of your eye.

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.

As soft lenses are flexible, when they are removed from their packaging you should always make sure that the lens is not inside out. You should also check that the lens is in good condition, especially the edges which can be easily damaged.

There are 2 methods to check whether a soft lens is inside out, both of which will be demonstrated by your optometrist. Some patients prefer to stand the lens on the tip of their index finger, concave side up and observe the shape of the edges. If the lens sits in a neat bowl shape, it is the correct way round. If the edges appear to flute out in a more saucer like shape, this suggests the lens is inside out.

Alternatively, some patients prefer to try to roll the lens into a cylinder, if the two edges meet at the centre and the lens rolls into a cylindrical tube it is the correct way round.

In either case, if you think the lens is inside out, its flexibility means that it can be easily flipped back to the correct way round.

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Ophthalmology

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**Patient
Information**

Insertion

It is best to work over a clean surface that will allow the lenses to be easily found if dropped and 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 lenses and may have found the best option for you.

After washing your hands, remove the lens from its case and balance on your 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.

With the middle finger of your other hand, 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 (coloured part of the eye).

Once the lens is in place, roll your eye around to help centration of the lens and to release any trapped air bubbles. Then slowly and gently release your eyelids. Try not to blink too hard as this may pop the lens out.

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

For details about contact lens solutions and preservative free saline, please refer to the Care Systems section in this leaflet.

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, and unlikely to cause damage to the lens. You should always wash and dry your hands before removing your lenses.

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Some patients prefer to remove the lens by bringing their hand over their head and holding the upper lid firmly at the lid margin (where the lashes start). With the middle finger of the other hand, pull the lower lid down. You should aim to hold the lids firmly apart to create enough space for lens removal.

Looking upwards, place your index finger onto the lens in your eye and using enough pressure to move the lens, slide the lens downwards on to the white part of the eye. When the lens is below the sensitive cornea and is on the white of the eye, it can be pinched off gently, using your finger and thumb.

Alternatively, some patients prefer to hold the lids in the same way, but look towards their nose and slide the lens to the side (away from the nose) and pinch it off from there.

We recommend that you keep your fingernails short and clean to avoid the risk of damaging the surface of your eye.

Cleaning

Lenses should be cleaned immediately after they are removed from the eye with a suitable soft contact lens cleaner or a 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 using a cleaner rather than a multipurpose solution, the lens should then be rinsed thoroughly with sterile saline before storage.

Soft lenses must not be allowed to dry out so after cleaning you should store them 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 rinsed with fresh disinfecting solution and left open in the air to dry. The lens case should be thoroughly washed out with fresh contact lens cleaning solution once a week.

Regular, monthly replacement of your contact lens case is essential for trouble free contact lens wear.

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For details about contact lens solutions and preservative free saline, please read the Care Systems section on the next page. **Your contact lenses should not come into contact with tap water. This is due to the high risk of serious contact lens related infections associated with tap water and contact lens wear.**

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 and preservative free saline 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 the vision has become blurred.
- Overnight wear of soft lenses significantly increases the risk of infections, so you should not sleep in your lenses unless instructed otherwise by your optometrist.
- If you fall asleep sleep accidentally wearing your contact lenses; on waking gently massage a closed eye lid. This will gently loosen the contact lens, as it may have stuck to your eye. If you have some lubricating/dry eye drops, insert them and remove the contact lenses and disinfect.

**Patient
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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/complications. You should therefore avoid these risks when wearing contact lenses.

Soft contact lenses should never come in to contact with tap water due to the potential risk for infection.

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 the 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 occur, and to allow the 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/>