

Buying **Contact Lenses**



Some common **Questions and Answers**
to help you buy your lenses safely



Wearing contact lenses offers many benefits. Following some simple precautions when buying lenses can help to make sure that you don't put the health and comfort of your eyes at risk. [The British Contact Lens Association](#) and [General Optical Council](#) have put together some common questions and answers to help you buy your lenses safely

How do I find out about wearing contact lenses?

- If you want to wear contact lenses to correct your eyesight, you must start by consulting an eye care practitioner for a fitting. Only registered optometrists, dispensing opticians with a specialist qualification (contact lens opticians) and medical practitioners can fit contact lenses. Fitting includes discussing your visual and lifestyle requirements, an eye examination to make sure your eyes are healthy and find out if you're suitable, and measurements of your eyes to ensure the best lens type, fit and vision, before trying lenses. Once you have worn the lenses, you should have the health of your eyes checked again. You will also need to learn how to handle and care for your lenses. Your practitioner will advise you when you should wear the lenses and how often you should replace them.

When is the fitting completed?

- Your prescribing practitioner will tell you when the fitting is completed. How long the fitting takes will depend on your lens type and your eye health. Don't forget that, once fitted, you will need to have regular check-ups to make sure your eyes are healthy and to get the best from your contact lenses.

Can I ask for a copy of my contact lens details?

- The details which enable a lens to be ordered for you are referred to as a contact lens specification. This is not the same as your spectacle prescription. Your practitioner must issue you with a contact lens specification once your contact lens fitting is completed.

Do I need a specification in order to buy contact lenses?

- An in-date specification is required for all contact lenses that are designed to correct your eyesight ('powered' contact lenses). The supplier must either have the original specification before supplying lenses or must verify the specification with the practitioner who fitted your lenses.

What should my contact lens specification include?

- The specification should have all the information you need to buy contact lenses. It must include the lens measurements, power, material and/or brand and indicate the expiry date. It should give the date you are due for your next scheduled contact lens check-up. Your name, full details of the prescribing practitioner, his/her GOC registration number and the practice address must also be included.

What if I just want contact lenses to change my eye colour?

- If you just want contact lenses that change the colour or appearance of your eyes rather than correct your eyesight ('zero powered' contact lenses), you're not legally required to have a fitting and specification, but it is in your best interest to do so. You need to take the same degree of care when buying and wearing these lenses as with any other lenses. It is essential to have adequate instruction on lens care solutions, hygiene and handling, and to follow all the recommended care procedures.

Where can I buy contact lenses?

- You can either buy your contact lenses from the practitioner who carried out your fitting, or from another supplier, provided the legal requirements are met. If you buy your lenses from another supplier, they must have your original specification, or check your specification with the person who fitted your lenses. Contact lenses are now available from suppliers such as websites and mail order companies. Whoever you buy from, there must be a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner supervising the sale or involved in the process. Zero-powered contact lenses can only be sold under the supervision of a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner, who must be on the premises at the time.



I'm under 16. Where can I buy contact lenses?

- For young people under 16, contact lenses can only be bought under the direct supervision of a registered optometrist, dispensing optician or medical practitioner. Similar restrictions apply to anyone who is registered as blind or partially sighted.

How long does my contact lens specification remain valid?

- Your contact lens practitioner will advise you how long your specification is valid, depending on things like the lens type, wearing schedule and replacement frequency, and your eye health. Your practitioner may recommend that you receive only a limited number of lenses at any one time, such as a maximum of six months' supply or the number of lenses you are likely to need before the expiry date of your specification.

How often should I have a contact lens check-up?

- Again, your contact lens practitioner will advise you when you need to return for a check-up, based on your individual needs. It is in your best interest for check-ups to be at least every 12 months or more often if necessary.

What should I do if I have a problem with my lenses between check-ups?

- If you have a problem with your eyes or lenses, don't wait for your next scheduled check-up. If your eyes don't *look good* or *feel good*, or if you don't *see well*, you should consult your contact lens practitioner for advice as soon as possible.

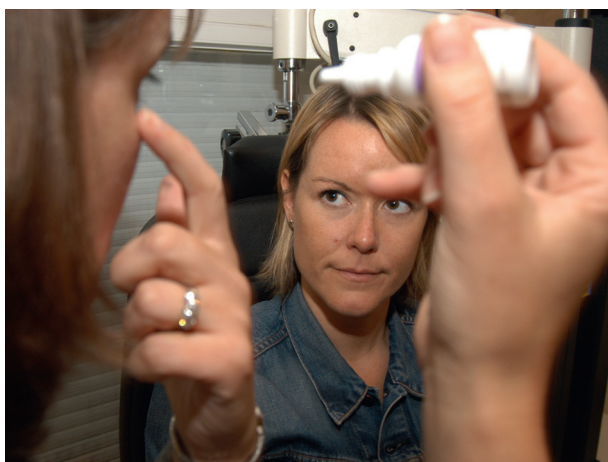
Can I buy contact lenses from the internet?

- Contact lenses can be sold online, as long as suppliers comply with regulations which ensure that professionals are involved in selling lenses, and lenses are supplied to an in-date specification. To protect you

from eye health problems, it is important for you to have a fitting and proper advice from an eye care practitioner, wherever you buy your lenses. You should also make sure that your supplier checks your specification.

Will I save money by buying contact lenses via the internet?

- Possibly – but don't put your eyesight at risk to save money. Remember that you need to pay for check-ups as well as for lenses. Your practitioner may include the cost of check-ups in the price of your lenses, or offer an inclusive monthly eye care plan or payment scheme.



Where can I buy my contact lens solutions?

- Contact lens solutions are available from pharmacies, supermarkets, websites and mail order companies as well as from eye care practitioners. However, to get the best out of your lenses you should not change the solutions you use or the cleaning method without the recommendation of your practitioner. It is good practice for your practitioner to record the recommended solutions on your contact lens specification.

WHAT'S THE BRITISH CONTACT LENS ASSOCIATION'S POSITION ON CONTACT LENS SALES?

- Contact lenses must be supplied within the law and proper safeguards must be in place to protect the health and comfort of your eyes. The importance of regular contact lens check-ups cannot be over-emphasised.

The BCLA's position is that contact lens wearers should not change their prescribed lens type, wearing schedule, replacement frequency, solutions or care procedures without the recommendation of their eye care practitioner. If you have a problem with your lenses it may be more difficult to resolve if they were not supplied by the prescribing practitioner.

The BCLA mission is to promote excellence in research, manufacture and clinical practice of contact lenses and related areas. Go to www.bcla.org.uk for more information on contact lenses and to find your nearest BCLA member practitioner.

WHO SHOULD I COMPLAIN TO IF I HAVE A PROBLEM?

- If you have a problem with your eyes or lenses you should consult your contact lens practitioner for advice. Complaints about consumer issues (such as refunds, customer service) can be dealt with by the Optical Consumer Complaints Service on 0844 800 5071 or visit www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk. If you have other concerns you should contact the General Optical Council (GOC). The GOC's role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of education and conduct among the optical professions in the UK. For more information, visit www.optical.org.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this leaflet, consumers should contact the BCLA or the General Optical Council for clarification or further information