

## Contact Lenses – Questions and Answers

Contact lenses offer many benefits and are often worn by those who prefer an alternative to glasses. However, because contact lenses are inserted onto the eye, they require more specifications than glasses and a greater responsibility for those who wear them. If you are a contact lenses wearer or if you are thinking about wearing contact lenses, the *College of Optometrists of Ontario* recommends that you take some extra precautions to protect your eye health. This document outlines some Frequently Asked Questions to assist you in making decisions about wearing contact lenses safely.

### What is a Contact Lens Exam?

Contact lenses come in a wide variety of designs, materials, sizes, and colours. The goal of a contact lens exam is to find the most appropriate lenses for your comfort, vision needs, and eye health. The exam also assists the optometrist in identifying and minimizing any risks or limitations associated with contact lens wear. A contact lens exam typically occurs after a routine eye examination has determined your general eye health status and vision correction needs.

Additional tests, not part of the routine eye examination, will be conducted to determine the lenses that are most appropriate for you. These tests are not government-insured and a contact

lens fitting fee may be charged. These tests normally include procedures to examine the anterior surface of your eye under magnification, the shape and size of your cornea, and your tear film quality. Your optometrist may also observe your eyelid position and movement. You will also be asked questions about your health, occupation and lifestyle. The answers you provide will help your optometrist recommend the most appropriate type of lens, lens material and replacement frequency for you.

Your optometrist will then select appropriate contact lenses and these initial diagnostic lenses will be evaluated on your eyes. Assessments will be performed to ensure that the lenses deliver satisfactory comfort and visual performance. You may need to try on more than one pair of contact lenses to identify which lenses are the best for you.

If you and your optometrist decide to proceed, instructions for lens insertion and removal, hygiene and wearing time will be

provided. You will be told about what you may experience as your eyes adapt to contact lenses. You will also be advised when and how to seek ongoing care, including emergency treatment.

After the initial contact lens exam, you will require one or more follow-up visits during the adaptation period to assess lens performance and ensure that your eyes are adapting normally to the lenses. This follow-up is crucial to complete the fitting process and the necessary information required for the final prescription.

In the future, your eyes and contact lenses will need to be carefully examined on a regular basis, even if the lenses continue to feel comfortable and give you clear vision. Many contact lens complications do not cause symptoms in the early stages, but professional examination can detect subtle changes in vision and eye health. Early detection of problems can prompt corrective measures before more serious complications develop.

## Why Is A Prescription Necessary for Contact Lenses?

Contact lenses are classified as a medical device by *Health Canada* and thus are regulated differently than glasses. All medical devices provide benefits while posing certain risks.

Risks can be minimized if your optometrist dispenses your contact lenses based on your contact lens prescription. Improperly fitting contact lenses may cause blurred vision, eye strain, eye pain, headaches or redness and swelling of the eye that can range from mild to severe. The most serious complications include infection and corneal ulcer, which can develop quickly and can lead to irreversible vision loss if not treated appropriately.

## My Optometrist says a Prescription for Contact Lenses is Different from one Required for Glasses. Why?

A prescription for contact lenses contains other information that may specify the brand, material, size and curvature of the contact lenses that are most appropriate for your comfort and vision. Sometimes the contact lens power may be different from what is specified for glasses to account for the way contact lenses fit closer to the eye than glasses.

## Can I Buy Contact Lenses From the Internet Without A Prescription?

While buying consumer products on the internet can be convenient, buying medical devices such as contact lenses online without a current prescription, contact lens fitting and regular examinations can be a serious risk to your sight and eye health. The *College of Optometrists of Ontario* recommends that you and your optometrist work together to ensure that you wear contact lenses safely.

## What If I Just Want Contacts to Change My Eye Colour?

Cosmetic contact lenses in Canada are sometimes sold “over the counter” in various retail settings by vendors other than eye care professionals. As a result, there can be an incorrect assumption that, because they do not correct eyesight, a contact lens exam and follow up is unnecessary. You should see

your optometrist and discuss any potential risks related to using contact lenses for cosmetic purposes.

## Can I Have a Copy of My Prescription For Contact Lenses?

After the contact lens fitting process is complete and your optometrist has identified the details of the contact lenses that are right for you, this prescription belongs to you and your optometrist must provide it to you upon request.

In some situations, your optometrist might have a valid reason to withhold the prescription. For example:

- if you cannot wear contact lenses safely (usually an eye health problem)
- if the fitting has not been completed
- if fees are outstanding

Your contact lens prescription, like other medical prescriptions, may have an expiry date after which it should not be filled.

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For further information on Health Canada’s recommendations regarding contact lenses, visit:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv-med/lenses-lentilles-eng.php#is>