



## CONTACT LENSES

### Who can wear contacts?

Contact lenses are used to correct the same conditions that glasses correct:

- Nearsightedness
- Farsightedness
- Astigmatism
- Presbyopia (the need for bifocals)

Certain individuals may require contact lenses for medical reasons, but they can also be fit for cosmetic reasons, such as changing eye color. There is no age limit for wearing contacts.

### Who should not wear contacts?

Safe contact lens wear requires reasonably healthy eyes. Some medical conditions may disallow contact lens wear. Allergies, infections, dry eyes, and other conditions may have implications on how or when contacts may be worn, but do not necessarily prohibit contact lens wear.

### Which type of contacts is best?

The doctor will determine contact lens options during the examination, and often, the patient will be given several options to choose from. The following summary reviews some basic characteristics of the different contact lens types:

*Rigid gas-permeable contacts* (RGP's) are so named because these materials retain their original shape on the eye and are permeable to oxygen. Benefits of this type of lens include superior visual acuity, excellent eye health, and long life. Modern fitting techniques have made these lenses very comfortable, however, there is a short period of adaptation before the lenses can be worn full-time. This type of lens may not be the first choice for those who work in very dusty environments, engage in rough contact sports, or those wanting contacts only for occasional wear.



*Soft contact lenses* are partially comprised of water, as such the material is more pliable and conforms to the shape of the eye when worn. Because these lenses are less durable than rigid lenses, they are typically replaced at frequent intervals in order to maintain maximum comfort, vision, and eye health. This planned replacement schedule ranges from a daily disposable lens (a fresh pair every day) to a six-month replacement lens (two pair per year). Because these planned replacement lenses allow a supply to be kept on hand, this can be very convenient for those who frequently travel or those who are prone to losing lenses. Adaptation is minimal with soft contacts, making them a good choice for those desiring contacts for occasional wear only.

Recently, a *hybrid contact lens* has been introduced which combines some of the advantages of a soft lens with some of the advantages of a rigid gas permeable lens. Continuous wear contacts are those which may be kept on during sleep. Although sleeping in contacts traditionally has been associated with more complications, recent advances have greatly enhanced the safety of this extremely convenient lens wear schedule.

*Bifocal or Multifocal contact lenses* enable people who require additional correction for reading (bifocals, progressives, or reading glasses) to view near and far without using glasses. Options are available in both soft and RGP materials. These lenses are highly specialized and require more time and expertise to fit. As such, there is more cost involved but they can be very rewarding for motivated individuals.

The cost of contact lenses should be discussed with the doctor before lenses are ordered. A first time wearer can expect to pay more than an established wearer does. This is because the first time wearers will require training on the proper care of lenses and have more follow up with the doctor to establish successful adaptation and visual function.

Vision plans often pay a portion of contact lens fees. If contact lenses are deemed medically necessary, they may also be covered by medical insurance. In evaluating the cost of contact lenses, it is important to consider what services are included. A thorough examination, a careful, competent fit and follow-up are as important as the lenses themselves.

Risks of wearing contact lenses range from minor irritations to serious permanent complications. For most people the benefits will greatly outweigh the risks. Serious complications are extremely rare but the potential should be discussed with the doctor before deciding on contact lens wear. Should medical complications arise, additional office visits and charges may be incurred.



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