

# Wearing **Contact Lenses**



**Thinking about trying contact lenses?**

Some common Questions  
and Answers to help you decide

More than three million people in the UK enjoy the many benefits of wearing contact lenses to correct their eyesight. If you'd like to join them, we have all the information you need to get started. **The British Contact Lens Association** has put together some common questions and answers to help you decide whether contact lenses are right for you and which type of lenses to choose



## **What are the benefits of contact lenses?**

Contact lenses offer freedom from wearing glasses, look more natural and provide an unobstructed view. They're not affected by fogging or rain and are unlikely to get lost. You're also able to wear your choice of sunglasses with contact lenses. There are benefits over surgery to correct your eyesight too: you can remove your lenses at any time but surgery is generally irreversible and you may still need glasses afterwards.

## **Can anyone wear them?**

Almost everyone who needs eyesight correction can now wear contact lenses – whether you're long or short-sighted, or have astigmatism. There are also bifocal and multifocal contact lenses for those who need different lens powers for distance and close work, or only have reading glasses. If you've tried contact lenses in the past you'll find that modern lenses are much more comfortable and convenient.

## **How will I know if contact lenses are right for me?**

Ask your BCLA contact lens practitioner for a contact lens trial so you can experience the excellent comfort and vision for yourself. Touch a lens and you'll see how soft lenses feel – much like a drop of water on the eye. Talk to your practitioner about your visual and lifestyle needs. And once you've tried lenses, you and your practitioner can decide together whether contact lenses are right for you.

## **Do I have to wear contact lenses every day?**

You probably will want to use your lenses every day once you try them. But you may prefer to wear contact lenses for some of the time – such as for going out and for sport – and glasses at other times for a different look. It's up to you!

## **Are contact lenses easy to use?**

Yes. Most people find they're so convenient and easy to use that they forget they're wearing them. Handling your lenses will soon be as natural as brushing your teeth. Your BCLA contact lens practitioner will help you get started and give you all the advice and help you need.



## What type of lens is best for me?

There are hundreds of different types of contact lenses and thousands of different fittings. Each lens needs to be fitted to meet your individual needs. Your BCLA contact lens practitioner will help you choose the best lenses to suit your eyes and eyesight. The two main types are:

### **Soft lenses**

These are the most common type. They are very soft and contain water, making them extremely comfortable to wear. Soft lenses are often described by how often they're replaced and when they're worn. Replacement is usually daily, two-weekly or monthly, and most are worn only during the day and removed at night.

Soft lenses come in a wide range of materials, fittings, powers and designs to correct almost all types of eyesight. Advances in materials have led to a new generation of soft lenses called silicone hydrogels that allow much more oxygen to pass through to the eye, making them a healthier choice. Some silicone hydrogel lenses may be worn overnight if your eyes are suitable and your practitioner recommends it.

### **Gas permeable lenses**

Gas permeable lenses are smaller than soft lenses and less flexible. They take a little longer to get used to, although regular wearers find them comfortable.

These lenses may be recommended for some eyesight conditions and shapes of eyes. They're more durable than soft lenses and are usually replaced every six or 12 months. The range of gas permeable lenses is also extensive and the latest materials enable more oxygen to pass through than the previous 'hard' lenses. Most are worn daily and removed at night.

**Within these two main categories are many other lens types, including:**

- Lenses to correct astigmatism ('toric' lenses)
- Bifocal and multifocal lenses to correct loss of focusing power with age
- Lenses that protect the eye from the harmful effects of UV radiation
- Coloured or special effects lenses to change your eye colour or appearance
- Lenses approved for overnight use ('flexible', 'extended' or 'continuous' wear)
- Lenses worn overnight to 'reshape' the eye and removed during the day
- Large, 'scleral' lenses for some specialist applications
- Combination soft and gas permeable lenses

Ask your BCLA contact lens practitioner or visit our Consumer Guide to Contact Lenses at [www.bcla.org.uk](http://www.bcla.org.uk) for more information on the different lens types.





## **Which contact lenses are best for my lifestyle?**

Everyone has different visual needs according to their lifestyle, work and leisure activities. There are various ways of wearing contact lenses, to suit your eyes and budget.

### **Daily disposable lenses**

If you're looking for the most convenient way to correct your eyesight, consider daily disposable contact lenses. These soft lenses are worn for a day and then simply thrown away – there's no need to clean or store them. Daily disposable lenses can be more expensive than other lenses if used every day, although you'll save on the cost of solutions. They're especially convenient and economical if you want to wear contact lenses part time – in fact they're ideal for sport, going out or travelling.

### **Two-weekly/monthly daily wear lenses**

These soft contact lenses are worn daily for up to a month and are removed each night then simply cleaned and stored in the solution recommended. Re-usable lenses offer all the benefits of soft lenses and are more cost-effective than daily disposables for those who wear their lenses every day or almost every day.

Most soft lenses today fall into these categories but some speciality lenses are replaced less often. Your BCLA contact lens practitioner will advise you on the correct replacement and wearing schedule for your lenses.

### **Flexible/extended/continuous wear lenses**

Contact lenses that can be left in the eye overnight or for extended periods are another simple and convenient way of correcting your eyesight. But only lenses approved for overnight use can be worn during sleep and then only on the advice of your BCLA contact lens practitioner since not everyone's eyes are suitable. Sleeping in contact lenses also carries an increased risk of infection. If you sometimes need to wear lenses overnight or have long hours of daily wear, these lenses may be appropriate.

### **Gas permeable lenses**

These lenses are cheaper to maintain than soft lenses and some people find them easier to handle. Special gas permeable lenses that are worn overnight to 'reshape' the eye and removed during the day may have lifestyle benefits for some wearers.

## **When can children start wearing contact lenses?**

Even young children can wear contact lenses and research has shown they can be very successful. Freedom from glasses can boost children's self-confidence, as well as allowing them to participate fully at school, at sports and at play. Now that most contact lenses are replaced often, there's no need to wait until children's eyes have stopped changing to wear contact lenses. Even babies may wear contact lenses but only for medical indications.

## **How can I get the best out of my lenses?**

Follow your BCLA contact lens practitioner's advice carefully to achieve the best possible comfort and vision. Hygiene is especially important, such as always washing and drying your hands before touching your lenses. Don't forget you'll need regular visits to check the health of your eyes, find out about the latest advances in contact lenses and make sure your lenses are the best for you and your eyesight.

## WHAT'S THE BRITISH CONTACT LENS ASSOCIATION'S POSITION ON WEARING CONTACT LENSES?

● Wearing contact lenses offers many benefits. Follow your eye care practitioner's recommendations carefully and do not change your prescribed lens type, wearing schedule, replacement frequency, solutions or care procedures without the advice of your practitioner. The importance of regular contact lens check-ups cannot be over-emphasised.

The BCLA's mission is to promote excellence in research, manufacture and clinical practice of contact lenses and related areas. Visit our Consumer Guide to Contact Lenses at [www.bcla.org.uk](http://www.bcla.org.uk) for more information and to find your nearest BCLA member practitioner. This information is designed to supplement the advice given to you by your practitioner.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of these answers, you should contact the BCLA or your practitioner for clarification or further information.