

Proper Care of Contact Lenses

More than 40 million people in the United States use contact lenses. Correct handling and care of this type of eyewear is important to avoid complications.

Cosmetic or prescription contact lenses are considered medical devices and are regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration. Only physicians and other licensed eye care professionals are allowed to prescribe contact lenses. It is necessary to meet with such a professional, discuss the different types of contact lenses, and have contact lenses individually fitted. It is very important to follow the doctor's advice and the manufacturer's guide regarding how to care for and when to replace the contact lenses. This applies to both cosmetic and prescription contact lenses. Inappropriate use and care of contact lenses can have serious consequences like infection or injury to the surface of the eye and may even lead to blindness.

Contact Lens Care

Before touching contact lenses, always wash your hands with soap and water and dry your hands well with a clean, lint-free cloth. Manufacturers recommend rubbing and rinsing contact lenses with contact lens disinfecting solution to clean contact lenses each time you remove them from your eyes. Store contact lenses in the proper lens storage case and replace your case every 3 months or sooner. Manufacturers also recommend rubbing and rinsing a contact lens case after each use with contact lens solution, drying it with clean tissue, and storing it upside down with the caps off after each use. Soak lenses overnight in sufficient contact lens solution to completely cover the lens. Contact lenses should never be stored in water. Only fresh contact lens solution should be used to clean and store contact lenses. Old solution in the storage case must be discarded and not reused or mixed with new solution.

Remove your contact lenses before sleeping unless directed otherwise by your doctor. This helps the cornea of the eye to "breathe" and restore its surface. Keep water away from your contact lenses. Manufacturers recommend avoiding showering, swimming, or going into hot tubs while wearing contact lenses. Manufacturers also recommend applying cosmetics after inserting lenses and removing lenses before removing makeup. Recommendations also include applying any aerosol products (such as hair spray, cologne, and deodorant) before inserting lenses. You should never share contact lenses with another person. Sharing can transfer germs between people or damage the cornea by an improperly fitted lens.

What to Do in Case of Problems

People who wear contact lenses should have a thorough eye examination at least once a year. It is recommended to have a backup pair of glasses with a current prescription in the event that problems occur with the contact lenses. An eye care professional should be contacted be-



fore using any topical eye products, even those that can be bought without a prescription. Some medicines may affect the vision or irritate the eyes. Remove contact lenses immediately and contact an eye doctor if you experience eye pain, discomfort, redness, or blurred vision.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/contactlenses/protect-your-eyes.html
- American Academy of Ophthalmology
www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/glasses-contacts-lasik/contact-lens-care.cfm

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Sources: US Food and Drug Administration, American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Optometric Association

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