



European
Council of
Optometry
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Contact Lenses, the Internet and You

For millions of people, wearing Contact Lenses (CLs) supplied via the Internet is an easy and convenient way to cater for their vision correction needs. You may already be one of them. Alternatively, you may be someone who is considering trying CLs for the first time – or maybe you wore Contact Lenses for a while some time ago and wish to return to wearing them. Whatever describes your situation, you may be considering the Internet both as a source of information and perhaps the method of supply for your CLs. After allthat's probably how you found this in the first place!

Prepared by the European Contact Lens Forum (ECLF, www.eclf.eu),

The ECLF is made up of representatives of the following professional organizations across Europe:

- the **European Contact Lens Society of Ophthalmology** (ECLSO) www.eclso.eu
- the **European Council of Optometry and Optics** (ECOO) www.ecoo.info
- the **European Federation of the Contact Lens Industry** (EFCLIN) www.efclin.com
- the **European Federation of National Associations and International Manufacturers of Contact Lens Products** (EUROMCONTACT) www.euromcontact.eu
- the **European representative of the International Association of Contact Lens Educators** (IACLE). www.iacle.org)

This document provides some simple and straightforward advice you might like to consider when choosing how and where to buy your CLs. The authors of this document have, as their primary concern, the health and comfort of your eyes.

Where Do I Start?

If you have not worn Contact Lenses before, or are returning to CL wear after a period of not wearing lenses; you should consult a contact lens specialist. Depending upon your country of residence your CL specialist may be referred to as an Ophthalmologist, Registered Optometrist or Dispensing Optician. A call to your local health authority should provide the guidance you need to find the right person local to you. Alternatively you may prefer to search the internet with the term "contact lens specialist + *my town". Once you have found a specialist that suits you, you'll probably be required to make an appointment to have your eyes examined, so you'll need to allocate sufficient time (up to an hour)

What Happens At The Appointment?

Your CL specialist will use the appointment to carry out a thorough examination of your eyes to ensure they are healthy and to check that you are suitable for wearing CLs – most people are. CLs are a medical device and their development, production and fitting are carefully regulated for your protection. Your specialist will also discuss what *you* would like to achieve from CL wear. The examination will also provide your specialist with some key measurements which, if you are suited to CL wear, are used to determine the type, size and shape of CLs best suited to your eyes. These measurements will form what is often known as your Contact Lens Prescription or Specification. *Remember – Your Contact Lens Specification is not the same as any spectacles or prescription you may have on file.*

As with other qualified professionals whose advice you may seek, your contact lens specialist may charge a fee for their services and you may be asked to sign a consent form.



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What Else Will My Specialist Do?

Your specialist will probably take the opportunity to tell you about the different types of CLs that are suitable for your eyes. *Remember – Not all CLs are the same. Even when the packages seem to bear all the same information i.e. Base Curve, Diameter, Water Content etc they may perform differently on different eyes. The instructions for use for one brand can be entirely different from another. Your trained specialist will be aware of these differences.* You may have the opportunity to try some CLs there and then with the specialist's expert guidance. They will show you how CLs should be applied and removed. They will also tell you about how CLs should be cared for and how to use any relevant care products such as solutions etc. It is likely that the specialist will suggest a trial period of wear with CLs best suited to your eyes. This is a good idea – in fact it is the best way to tell if you are really suited to CL wear. *Remember – Just as when you buy shoes – not one size fits all. Follow your specialist's advice.* You and your specialist will work together during this "fitting process" to determine the best possible CL for you and your specific needs.

Care of Lenses

Your specialist will introduce you to the care regime they would like you to use. The choice is often related to the material of the lenses worn, so you do need to keep with the suggested solution / regime or ask before changing the brand.

The risks of lens wear relate very strongly to bacteria that can be found on the the contact lenses and in the storage case. It is therefore very important that you clean your lenses by rubbing and rinsing them after every wear. Also fully empty the case after application of the lenses, rinse and dry it. It is also recommended to carefully read the instruction for use provided with the care system and follow the indicated regimen.

Aftercare

At the next appointment your specialist will ask about your experiences with the "fitting CLs" – Are they comfortable - did you encounter any problems – Is there any aspect of managing the CLs that you are unsure of etc. The specialist will of course then carry out further examinations to see how your eyes are adapting to CL wear. Based on what you discuss with your specialist and what the examination reveals, it may be that your specialist will recommend further steps with maybe a different size, shape, type or even brand of CLs. All these factors can be important in finding the best CLs for your particular eyes. Your specialist will also advise you about the future follow-up and after-care appointments to make sure that your eyes stay healthy. The same examinations will also tell your specialist if your CLs specification needs to be changed. This can happen over time and is quite normal.

What Happens Next?

That's up to you! If you are suited to CL wear you'll probably want to get started right away. It's possible that your specialist may provide you with exactly the CLs you need. If not, your specialist will know a suitable supplier. You'll be provided with a copy of your CL specification that will be required by anyone looking to supply you with CLs. You'll have had a successful fit so it makes sense to have a note of the brand and parameters of the CLs you are wearing. This specification is usually time limited in its validity.



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What If I Want To Get My Contact Lenses via The Internet?

No problem – But there are some basic precautions you should take to satisfy yourself that your supplier cares as much about your eyes as you do:

Do – check your chosen supplier if they have qualified CL specialists overseeing their supply of CLs, if they don't you may prefer to seek another supplier.

Do – ask for the specific CL brand and parameters you have been fitted with and are successfully wearing.

Do – contact your specialist immediately if you encounter any problems with wearing your CLs i.e. reduced vision, itching, redness or pain or if you have any other concerns or questions.

Don't – buy your CLs or care products from any provider that does not ask for your specification.

Don't – accept alternative products that may be offered to you without first checking with your specialist, despite the same numbers, as they may still be vastly different. This includes solutions for the care of your lenses.

Don't – get tempted by promotions and buy more than you need. CLs have a shelf life like many other products. Supplies are plentiful, so buy just what you need.

Don't – be tempted to “self select” or substitute your CLs with products appearing to be the same, because they are not.

Anything Else?

Yes – enjoy your CLs – make the most of the convenience and advantages they offer you every day. But remember :-

- ✓ Apply, remove and care for your lenses as instructed by your specialist
- ✓ Don't alter the wearing and replacement guidelines issued by your specialist
- ✓ Use only the care products recommended by your specialist
- ✓ Regularly visit your specialist for continued after care.