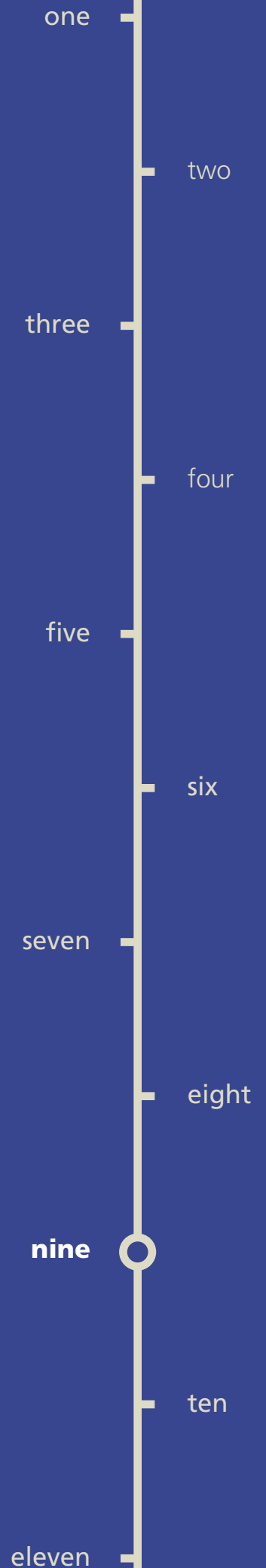




The Customer Journey

Touchpoint **nine:**

Contact lens examination



Touchpoint **nine**: Contact lens examination

The contact lens examination is not fully understood by the majority of potential new contact lens wearers. Many think of it as being similar to or the same as an eye examination. Very few understand the procedures and measurements that are undertaken or the significance of them. However, this is not their fault. If anyone is to blame, it is the practice for not explaining the process more fully. It should be the duty of the practice owner or manager to ensure that all practice staff understand what happens during a contact lens assessment examination. This will provide the practice team with greater confidence when handling contact lens enquiries. Why not arrange for all staff to sit in on a contact lens examination appointment? Alternatively, encourage each member of the practice team to try contact lenses themselves. This will remove much of the fear and many of the myths surrounding contact lenses. It will also mean that all staff will be more confident when talking to patients and other enquirers. This touchpoint covers guidelines to ensure that all staff understand the procedures that take place during a fitting assessment, as well as some ideas for ensuring that the practice team take a more proactive approach to contact lenses in your practice.

With the latest advances in technology, contact lenses are no longer just for the young. There are lenses suitable for all types of prescription including presbyopes and astigmatism, as well as materials designed to allow greater amounts of oxygen through them. The modern approach to contact lens fitting is about providing the best contact lenses to suit the needs of the wearer. These needs may include occasional wear, perhaps for sports or leisure purposes, or extended wear when lenses can be worn for up to thirty days continuously. The latest technology lens materials and designs have reduced the need for complex cleaning and disinfecting systems, so the wearing of contact lenses is now more convenient and safer than ever before.

The contact lens fitting

New wearers must be informed that the fitting of contact lenses is a highly skilled process. It is not just about selecting the lens that fits best and provides the clearest vision, but includes an assessment of the general health and condition of the front of the eye. This includes the cornea and the eyelids.

During the examination, they will need to be told that the health of the cornea is assessed using an instrument called a slit-lamp binocular microscope. By describing how this instrument shines a beam of light onto the front of the eye and looking through the microscope the structures of the front of the eye, including the layers of tissue in the cornea, are observed in detail. In addition, let them know that this instrument is especially useful to observe any changes in the general health of the cornea during aftercare appointments. This will help to remind them of the importance of aftercare appointments.

If a keratometer is used, make sure potential wearers understand why.

An explanation of the main objectives of contact lens fitting should be provided. These objectives are likely to include; the selection and fitting of lenses to provide optimum:

- a. visual acuity
- b. lens comfort, and
- c. maintenance of normal eye health.

In most cases, visual acuity with contact lenses will be equivalent to, or better than, the best-corrected vision with spectacles. In addition, peripheral or side vision will not be hindered, as it would be with a spectacle frame. However, in some cases small amounts of astigmatism may not be masked or corrected, especially with soft lenses. This can mean that vision with contact lenses will not be as good as with spectacles.

A contact lens that is uncomfortable will be rejected by the wearer eventually, regardless how good the visual acuity or ocular health benefits. In fact wearers will often favour a lens that provides better comfort over one that provides better visual acuity, but is uncomfortable to wear.

All wearers must be reminded that it is essential that contact lens wear is monitored closely and regularly to ensure that no adverse physiological changes occur. They can be reassured that if these changes do occur and

are identified early, alternative lens designs, materials, wearing schedules, or care systems can usually resolve them.

All staff must be made aware that there is no single lens which is best for all patients and that part of the art and science of successful contact lens fitting involves choosing the best lens, design, type and fitting method for each specific contact lens patient.

Staff need to know that during a contact lens fitting appointment, the Practitioner or CL Optician will conduct a routine similar to the following:

- Assess the patient's prescription
- Check the front surface of the eye to ensure it is healthy and that there are no abrasions on the cornea
- Check that the tear layer is sufficient and healthy
- Check the health of the eyelids, inside and out
- Measure the curvature of the cornea
- Measure the diameter of the pupil and the iris
- Try several trial lenses on the eye to obtain the most comfortable fit
- Confirm the prescription of the contact lens
- Explain what happens next, e.g. lenses need to be ordered, teaching insertion & removal, aftercare and follow-up visits

Explaining the options

So that all new wearers feel that they will be making their own decision when being fitted with contact lenses, it is wise to give them a choice of lens types. These can be described using features, to describe the technical attributes and benefits to explain what these features will mean to them as an individual. This will still give the Practitioner control, but will allow the patient to make an informed choice. It is recommended that you start with the best and usually most expensive option first. This can be followed by the next best and so on. Usually three choices will be sufficient to avoid confusion.

Do provide plenty of opportunities throughout the fitting for questions to be asked.

Aftercare

All patients must be advised to come for regular aftercare checks. They should also be told that during an aftercare appointment, the following are checked:

- The lenses fit well
- The quality of vision is still good
- The lenses are comfortable
- There is not a significant accumulation of deposits
- The correct solutions are being used and the recommended procedure is adhered to
- The cornea, tear layer, sclera and iris are still healthy. If there are changes, wearing time may be reduced or a different type of lens advised.

Confirm the schedule for aftercare appointments according to the lens type and the wearing frequency.

A proactive approach

Some patients will ask about contact lenses. If this is the first time they have thought about wearing them, their motivation to try them may be due to one of the following reasons:

Vanity

They may want to try contact lenses for the simple reason that they do not wish to wear spectacles all of the time.

Cosmetic reasons

If the prescription is relatively high (i.e. over ± 4.00 D sphere or ± 2.00 D cylinder) their spectacle lenses may appear be thick and heavy. Contact lenses eliminate both of these problems.

Equally, if they have vision in one eye only then they may purchase a contact lens for that one eye.

Good all round vision

Sometimes people find that the rims of their spectacles intrude on their peripheral vision for certain activities such as driving and sports. Contact lenses eliminate this problem.

Sports

Some find spectacles uncomfortable and dangerous when playing sports. The only sport for which contact lenses are not suitable is swimming. This is because either they will absorb the chemicals from the swimming pool and cause infection and / or red eyes, or they will simply float away.

Occupation

Certain occupations lend themselves to contact lens wear and others may not be suitable. It is not only the job itself, which influences the type of lens prescribed, but also the working environment. For example, if someone works on a building site where there is a chance of spectacles being broken, contact lenses may be an option. However, dust on the site could cause discomfort when wearing contact lenses.

Other occupations generally suitable for contact lens wear include:

- Pilots – requiring all round vision
- Photographers – the eyepiece of the camera may scratch spectacle lenses
- Fashion models – spectacles can distract from the overall appearance
- Footballers – spectacles are at risk from damage and there is a danger of a broken spectacle lens damaging the wearer's eye.

This is not an exhaustive list.

So far, we have considered some of the reasons why someone might initiate a conversation with you about contact lenses. However, research has shown that being proactive in discussing the benefits of contact lenses will increase the number of contact lens wearers in your practice.

Being proactive means talking to patients about contact lenses, instead of hoping that they will approach you on the subject.

Think about some of the reasons why some people do not always think of contact lenses as an option.

Fear!

The press sometimes report horror stories of people who have allegedly lost a contact lens behind their eye. Of course this is not possible.

Likewise, some TV programmes have dramatically reported incidents concerning either contact lenses or cleaning solutions, which are usually out of context, but may still put people off the idea of trying them.

The other fear is a natural apprehension to put something in their eyes. This is where a positive motivation for trying contact lenses, can help someone overcome this fear.

Previous experience

There are many spectacle wearers who would prefer not to wear glasses but who may have been told in the past that they were not suitable for contact lenses. The latest technology has made contact lenses more comfortable and easier to wear than ever before. This means that almost anyone could wear some type of contact lens successfully.

Ignorance

When working in an optical practice, it is easy to forget that the majority of people know very little about contact lenses and because of this may have never considered them as an option for themselves. Unless you mention contact lenses to them they will carry on with their spectacles until someone else (a competitor perhaps!) encourages them to try contact lenses. When talking with patients in the practice try to bring contact lenses into the conversation. This can be quite easy if they mention suitable hobbies or leisure activities, when you could say something like 'Have you considered wearing contact lenses when you play golf?'

Raising customer awareness of contact lenses

There are many different ways of increasing patients' awareness of contact lenses. Here are a few suggestions:

- Put a contact lens booklet in the bag when they come to collect their spectacles

- When booking appointments, ask them if they currently wear contact lenses and, if not, have they ever considered them
- Use a pre-examination/lifestyle questionnaire to understand the patient's visual requirements better
- Send a contact lens booklet to those who have booked a sight test
- Make sure that contact lens leaflets are always available in prime locations such as the waiting area
- Raise the topic of contact lenses with those who are looking at frames
- You may have some idea of your own regarding your particular practice
- Discuss them with your practice team and decide the best ways of putting them into action.

Reasons for a back-up pair of spectacles

Whatever a person's reasons for wanting contact lenses they must be advised that they will not be a complete substitute for spectacles. They must have a pair of spectacles with an up-to-date prescription for when they are unable to wear their contact lenses.

For example:

- a) An eye infection may mean they should stop wearing their contact lenses until advised by their doctor and / or contact lens fitter that they can resume wearing them.
- b) They are wearing contact lenses designed for short-term wear, i.e. social wear.
- c) They lose or damage a lens and have to wait for a replacement.

Or, other reasons.

Action Plan

Ensure the entire staff team understand what happens during a contact lens fitting assessment. Also, encourage them to suggest ways that a more proactive approach could be made towards contact lenses in your practice.

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