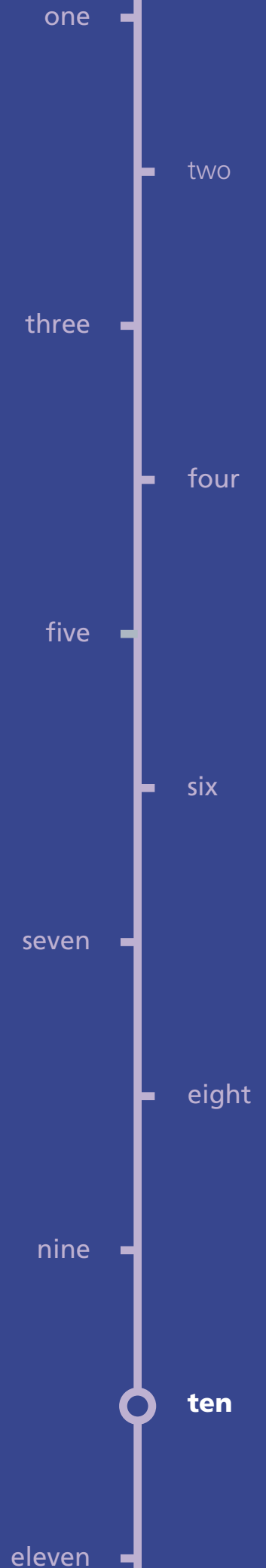




The Customer Journey

Touchpoint **ten**: Wearing and caring for contact lenses (I&R)



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The appointment for new contact lens wearers coming to collect contact lenses and learn how to handle them for the first time is very important. Most new contact lens wearers will probably be a little nervous or apprehensive about this visit to the practice. Because of this they may not remember to ask all the questions they may have. Equally they probably will not remember everything they have been taught. For those intending to wear contact lenses most of the time, it will be a complete lifestyle change. They will have to adjust to a different routine, remembering to remove their lenses before going to bed and allowing a few extra minutes in the morning to put them in. Additionally, when staying away they will have to take lenses, cases and possibly solutions with them. The challenge to the practice team must be to encourage new wearers to think of these changes positively and remind them of the visual freedom they will have wearing contact lenses, for example, a wide uninterrupted field of vision and the freedom to take part in more active social pursuits without having to worry about spectacles.

Handling contact lenses

Before handling contact lenses you must ensure that your hands are clean. Washing with soaps, which do not contain moisturisers or perfumes, is best and lint-free towels should be used. This will avoid lens contamination. Ideally contact lens handling should be taught in a quiet area of the practice, away from distractions. Do ensure the area is clean and tidy.

With careful handling, soft lenses are not easily damaged. Fingernails should be clean and short. Contact between fingernails and lenses should be avoided at all times.

The basic rule is to only use fingertips and not a pinching action, which may bring fingernails in contact with the lens.

To avoid lenses becoming mixed up, it is a good idea to adopt a standard routine; always handling the right lens first.

Before placing the lens on the eye, you should check that it is not inside out.

If the lens is placed on the eye inside out it will not cause any harm. However, it is unlikely to be very comfortable and the vision not as good.

Most people will become quite good at handling lenses within a few days.

Before starting, prepare the following:

- A quiet place, away from the rest of the practice. You may have a separate room or area for contact lens teaches
- The patient record card and contact lenses. Check that the lenses are as specified on the order
- The correct starter pack of solutions. Remind yourself how the system works
- A mirror (with a magnifier if the customer is long sighted)
- A kidney bowl or other small bowl
- Tissues
- Can of saline solution

Insertion and Removal Techniques

When teaching new contact lens wearers how to handle their lenses, it is essential that you are confident and adept at handling lenses yourself. The methods outlined in this section are a guide and your Practitioner may suggest alternative techniques.

The key to performing successful contact lens teaches is patience! You must keep in mind that putting something into the eye is not a natural thing for someone to do. The natural defence mechanism of the eye is to blink or close when an alien object gets close to it.

Here are some points to remember when teaching someone to insert a contact lens.

- Avoid jargon. For example it will be easier for the patient to understand if you refer to insertion and removal as 'putting in' and 'taking out'.

- Some may feel a little faint or queasy when inserting a contact lens for the first time
- Constantly reassure them and use positive words and gestures to encourage them to succeed
- If they start to panic when they try to remove the lens, keep calm and tell them to take a break
- If they are in pain or truly distressed about the removal of the lens, ask the Optometrist or the contact lens fitter to remove it for them
- Men often find inserting and removing contact lenses harder than women. This is possibly because women are generally more used to touching the areas around their eyes when applying make-up
- Men have larger fingers and relatively small eyes, which can also cause difficulties

Before starting, develop a rapport by talking to them in general to relax them. Explain what is going to happen and that you will be there to help them until they can insert and remove them with confidence.

- Ask them to wash their hands and dry them thoroughly. You should do the same. Explain that they must always do this before they touch the lenses. At this stage, check the length of their nails. Long nails can scratch the surface of the cornea. It may be necessary for them to clip their nails before you continue.
- Firstly check that they are able to touch the white of their eye (the sclera) without too much difficulty. If they find this impossible you may have to ask them to re-book for the next day and in-between times they should practise touching the whites of their eyes. The sclera has no nerve endings therefore it does not hurt when touched. The cornea, however, is very sensitive.
- Assuming they are happy to continue, show them how to insert a lens before you take the lens out of the bottle or blister pack. This gives them a chance to practise holding their eyelids out of the way and understand what each hand will be doing. Show them how to remove the lenses from the packaging without damaging them.

When ready you can continue with the following steps.

1. Place the lens on the fingertip of the index finger of either hand. If the lens is very wet it may be difficult to make it leave the finger. Excess moisture can be removed by transferring the lens from one finger to the other.
2. The other hand should be placed on the forehead, with fingers pointing down. The middle finger of this hand can then be used to pull up the upper eyelid and hold it in place.
3. The middle finger of the other hand can be used to pull down the lower lid. If this has been done properly, it will be difficult to blink.
4. Looking straight ahead into a mirror, the lens should be aimed at the iris (coloured part of the eye). As the lens touches the eye, it will start to gently wrap onto it. Before the eyelids are released, the wearer should make sure the lens is sitting in place.
5. The eyelids can then be released, carefully. If the lens has bubbles under it or is not centred, the eyelids should be closed and the lens gently massaged through the upper lid.

The eye can be opened to check the position of the lens. It should be comfortable and the vision clear.

If the lens is uncomfortable it may be due to small particles of dust under the lens. To remove these, a fingertip should be placed on the centre of the lens. The eyes can then be moved, not the lens. The lens will become dislodged onto the sclera (white of the eye). By looking straight ahead the lens will become re-positioned. This sliding action should remove small dust particles.

If the discomfort persists the lens should be removed, rinsed with sterile saline, and re-inserted.

Lens removal

This is often easier than lens insertion, for beginners. First of all, ensure that both hands are clean and dry.

1. Using a mirror, the lens should be checked to see that it is in place.
2. The upper and lower lids should be held in place, in the same way as for lens insertion.
3. With the fingertips of the thumb and index finger the lens should be gently pinched, at the 3 and 9 o'clock position. The thumb and index finger should be kept in contact while doing this.

NOTES:

- Until a wearer has gained confidence they should handle their lenses over a flat surface.
- If working over a wash hand basin, they should ensure the plug is in!
- The wearer should avoid the eyelids snapping shut, immediately after insertion as the lens may become dislodged.
- If the lens folds and becomes stuck after removal, it should be soaked in sterile saline to return to shape.

Soft lenses and make-up

Make-up can be worn successfully with contact lenses if these guidelines are followed:

- Lenses should be inserted before applying make-up.
- Cream eye shadows are better than powder, to avoid flaking.
- Eye liner should not be placed between the eyelash line and the eye. This will avoid lens discolouration.
- Heavily fibrous types of mascara should be avoided.
- If using hairspray, the eyes should be kept closed until the spray has settled.

Contact Lens Care

Regardless of the type of contact lenses worn, the importance of good hygiene and proper cleaning should be emphasised to all wearers.

This will ensure:

- Healthy eyes
- Good vision
- Comfort
- Optimum lens life

All wearers, apart from those wearing daily disposable lenses, extended wear lenses or those advised by their Contact Lens Practitioner to do otherwise, should follow these three steps:

1. Daily cleaning
2. Daily disinfecting
3. Regular protein removal

1. Daily cleaning. This step is essential as it removes surface debris from the lens. This debris includes mucus, protein and calcium, which adhere to the lens surfaces from the tear fluid. If left on the lens, there is likely to be a reduction of visual acuity. Microorganisms will also multiply more readily, making the disinfection process less effective. Most cleaning systems have a separate surfactant cleaner for daily cleaning. However, the newer 'one bottle' lens care systems have a built-in cleaner. All should be used in the same way.

The lens should be placed in the palm of the hand. After applying a few drops of the cleaning solution to the lens surface, it should be gently rubbed with the first or second finger for between 15 and 30 seconds.

Soft lenses should then be turned inside out and the process repeated. Once rinsed with sterile saline, the lenses are ready for disinfection.

2. Daily Disinfecting. Even though daily cleaning removes much of the surface debris, microorganisms such as bacteria and fungi still remain on the lens.

If the wearer fails to effectively disinfect their lenses on a daily basis, eye infections are a likely result.

There are three methods of disinfection for soft lenses:

- Hydrogen Peroxide systems
- Cold chemical systems
- Heat

Hydrogen Peroxide

Hydrogen Peroxide systems are generally considered to be the most effective of methods. They are able to kill the majority of commonly found microorganisms.

Most Hydrogen Peroxide systems consist of two steps. The first step involves soaking the lenses in the peroxide to disinfect them. The second step involves a neutraliser to break the peroxide down into water and oxygen. This second stage is essential to prevent the peroxide stinging the wearer's eye. Some of the newer systems have a slow dissolving tablet that will eventually neutralise the peroxide over a period of time.

Cold Chemical

These systems are becoming very popular due to their convenience. There are now a number of 'one bottle' solution systems available.

The lenses are soaked in the solution overnight to disinfect them. In the morning the lenses are rinsed with fresh solution, or sterile saline, and placed in the eye. The same solution is used for daily cleaning.

Heat

This was very popular in the early days of soft contact lens wear. It is a convenient, economical and an effective method of soft lens disinfection. However, it does dramatically reduce the life of many of today's modern soft lenses. This is mainly due to the heat causing proteins deposited on the lens to denature causing the lens to become opaque and discoloured.

With any system, it is important that the manufacturer's and Practitioner's instructions are followed carefully.

3. Regular Protein removal. This step may not be recommended for wearers of monthly, fortnightly, weekly and obviously daily, disposable lenses.

However, wearers of durable contact lenses will need to de-proteinise their lenses regularly. The Contact Lens Practitioner will advise the frequency. It will usually be necessary monthly, or sometimes fortnightly.

The most popular method is an enzyme tablet, which is dissolved in sterile saline solution. The lenses are left soaking in this solution for between 15 minutes and 12 hours. Failure to remove protein from the lenses can result in the protein becoming denatured. The eye can then develop an allergic-type reaction.

Saline solution is a solution of salt dissolved in sterile water and is similar in saltiness to tear fluid. There are two types of saline available:

Buffered saline

The solution has been treated so that it is very similar to the pH (acidity or alkalinity) of the eye. You can compare it to special pH soaps, which are better for your skin because their pH is closer to that of the skin. This means that the solution is less likely to cause stinging when the lens is inserted into they eye.

Non-buffered saline

This is the saline solution, which is not as close to the pH of the eye as the buffered version. Some customers find no problems with this saline. If it does sting they can be offered the buffered saline, which will be more comfortable. Most saline solutions are packaged in an aerosol can to ensure sterility.

It is important to advise customers that saline alone will not disinfect contact lenses.

If all the above steps are followed, the wearer considerably reduces the risks of infection related to contact lens wear.

Remember... The vast majority of contact lens wear complications are due to inadequate lens cleaning and hygiene.

Rigid gas permeable lens cleaning solutions

The cleaning regimes for RGP lenses are more straightforward than those for soft lenses. This is because rigid lens materials are not porous and therefore it is only the lens surface that has to be cleaned.

Cleaners

RGP lenses must be surface cleaned in the same way in which soft lenses are surface cleaned. The surface cleaners in a RGP lens care regime contain a friction agent, which removes stubborn protein deposits, eliminating the need to use protein removal tablets.

Wetting and soaking

The second part of a RGP lens care regime is a solution which performs two functions –

a) Disinfecting

The lenses, once cleaned and rinsed in saline, are placed in a case and covered with the wetting and soaking solution. They are left overnight to remove any microorganisms present on the surfaces of the lenses.

b) Wetting

The surfaces of RGP lenses are hydrophobic (water repellent). This means that a wetting agent is required to ensure that the lens is comfortable on the eye. The lenses are removed from the overnight solution, rinsed with saline and then a drop of wetting and soaking solution is put into the concave side of the lens, i.e. the side of the lens that will be in contact with the cornea.

Protein removal

Although protein does not get into the lens material, it can still become deposited on the surface of the lens. Using a cleaner on a daily basis will remove these deposits for most wearers. However, some customers who are 'heavy depositors' or who do not comply with their care regime may need to use protein removal tablets on an occasional basis.

If the lenses are left in saline for more than 24 hours, fungus will grow on them and could damage the lens.

Cleaning and rinsing together will remove over 99% of microorganisms from contact lenses.

The do's and don'ts of contact lens wear and care

The Optometrist and/or Contact Lens Optician should have discussed the things they should and should not do regarding contact lenses. However, by the time they come to learn how to insert and remove their lenses and find out how to use the cleaning regimes, they may have forgotten much of what was said.

It is very important that you remind them of the do's and don'ts of contact lens wear.

Here are some of the most important things to advise new wearers to ensure they wear their contact lenses successfully and reduce the risk of any complications.

Do	Do not
Follow the cleaning regime, as instructed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the solution regime without asking the Optometrist or Contact Lens Fitter. • Try to economise on solution by using less than the required amount or making it last more than one day. • Mix solutions with other makes or types.
Replace tops of solution bottles after use to avoid contamination from the air.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave solution bottles open in the bathroom or other warm, damp places.
Adhere to the wearing time advised by the Optometrist or contact lens fitter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear the lenses full time if they become uncomfortable. • Wear contact lenses for longer than advised.
Keep a check on the 'use before' dates on the solution bottles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to economise on solution by keeping an open bottle for months.
Discard the solution no more than a week after the 'use before date'.	

Do	Do not
Clean the contact lens case regularly and leave to dry in the air.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the same contact lens case for months without cleaning it.
Replace the contact lens case every three months.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use tap water with contact lenses.
Ensure that you come for after care checks as advised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assume that everything is fine and that you do not need to have aftercare check-ups.
Call the practice with any questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignore discomfort from the lenses.

Finally...

Due to the large amount of information to remember for first time contact lens wearers, it is recommended that all the handling and caring instructions are supplied in writing before they leave the practice.

In addition, it is advisable to ask all new wearer to sign a disclaimer form to confirm that they understand how to handle their lenses and that written instructions have been supplied.

Customer Journey materials

'Choosing and using soft contact lenses' booklet (ZCJUSINGBOOK)

'Choosing and using soft contact lenses' video (ZCJUSINGVID)

'Contact lens proactive dispensing mat' (ZCJDISPMAT)

Action Plan

As a practice team, review the current arrangements and procedures for contact lens handling teaching. Identify and instigate changes that will enhance the experience for first time contact lens wearers.

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