



Extended-Wear Contact Lenses

Some people do not consider wearing contact lenses because they think the required cleaning, disinfecting, storing, and inserting are too much trouble. They may also want the option of occasionally napping or sleeping with their contacts in their eyes.

Extended-wear contacts are designed to appeal to these people. They require less maintenance than daily wear lenses and because they are thinner and allow more oxygen to reach the eyes, they may be left in the eye overnight.

To use extended-wear contact lenses, you must be free of external eye disease, have normal tear function, and be motivated to take care of them.

Infection is the most significant complication of extended-wear contact lens use. They must be removed at least once a week and thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. Many studies show the cornea is put at increased risk of infection by wearing contact lenses overnight. The risk of developing an infection in the cornea is 10-15 times greater for those who wear extended-wear contacts overnight than for those who use daily wear soft lenses. This risk increases with the number of consecutive days the contacts are worn overnight. Infections may range from simple conjunctivitis to blinding endophthalmitis, which is a serious infection that travels through all layers of the eye.

The decision to accept the risks and benefits of extended-wear contacts requires a process of evaluation between you and your doctor. Once you are carefully fit for your contact lenses, follow-up exams with your eye physician to ensure continuing eye health is important. As with any contact lens, extended-wear contacts should be removed at the first sign of redness or discomfort.