

Contact lens service

Information for patients

This leaflet provides information and guidance for patients who require contact lenses following a referral from an ophthalmologist (eye doctor). If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor.

In all cases, a doctor will explain the procedure for fitting specialist contact lenses to you and answer any questions you may have.

What is the contact lens service?

Based at the Royal Free Hospital, under the care of a team of specialist optometrists (clinical professionals who specialise in the care of eyes), the service includes the fitting of specialist contact lenses with the aim of improving your vision. This is followed by regular contact lens checks to ensure your prescription and fit is correct.

What happens following my contact lens referral?

Fitting lenses requires a series of three initial appointments. They are as follows:

1. Appointment 1: Contact lens fit

At this appointment the specialist optometrist will take a scan of the front of your eye to find the best fitting contact lens for you. They will then place trial lenses in your eyes to test the fit. A topical anaesthetic may be used to make you feel more comfortable.

2. Appointment 2: Teaching and handling

At this appointment we will provide you with your custom contact lenses. It can take 2-8 weeks from your first appointment for your lenses to arrive depending on their complexity and the individual manufacturer. You will be shown how to insert, remove, handle, clean and store the lenses by a specialist. If you are able to do this successfully, you will be able to take the lenses home after this appointment.

If you're unable to do this successfully on the day, we may ask you to return on another day to try again, and you may decide against using contact lenses.

3. Appointment 3: Contact lens aftercare

A follow-up appointment for contact lens aftercare will be scheduled 4-6 weeks after your teaching and handling appointment. Please wear your lenses for a minimum of two hours prior to this appointment and attend wearing them.

The specialist optometrist will check the fit and vision of your contact lenses and answer any questions or queries you may have. At the end of the appointment you will be told when your next routine contact lens aftercare appointment is due. You will also be required to pay for your lenses in full at this time, unless you are exempt.

What do I need to bring to the appointments?

- Your current glasses and most recent eye test result.
- Any contact lenses you currently wear or have previously worn.
- Your contact lens case and solution you are currently using.
- Evidence of any state benefits you receive as you may be entitled to a reduction in the cost of your contact lenses if you are eligible.

Am I eligible for contact lenses?

Contact lenses are provided at the Royal Free Hospital only when there is a medical need. Usually this is when vision cannot be improved with glasses but can be with contact lenses. We must receive a referral from your ophthalmologist at the Royal Free London, which will be reviewed by the specialist optometrists to ensure there is a clinical need for contact lenses.

We prescribe and fit contact lenses for a range of medical eye conditions, such as keratoconus, corneal distortion or scarred/white corneas. We also treat patients with very high prescriptions (eg over +10.00DS or -15.00DS), to relieve pain or for cosmetic reasons if your eye has damage (eg from infection or trauma).

We cannot fit contact lenses if normal vision can be obtained with glasses. You will need to go to your own optician for this.

Paying for your contact lenses

The lenses cost £57 per lens and can last for a year. There may be cases where your contact lens will need replacing every six months.

Statutory NHS patient charges or exemptions arrangements apply and are updated annually on 1 April each year. The current prices are available from the contact lens clinic.

If you require replacement lenses or a lens breaks outside the three-month manufacturer's warranty period, the same charges apply as for your first pair of lenses (this does not affect your statutory rights).

Please note that lenses will not be ordered until payment or proof of exemption has been seen.

Exemptions include:

- Patients who have proof of a qualifying benefit (eg universal credit)
- Children under 16, or 16 to 19 years old and in full-time education.
- Patients who are not eligible for exemption can apply to the NHS Business Services Authority for a contribution to the cost of their lenses using an HC1 form, which can be obtained directly from the authority (0300 3301 343) or online at: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

Important note

If you are exempt from standard charges but repeatedly break or lose lenses, we will have to charge you for replacements. To avoid the problem of contact lens loss, we advise that you keep a spare, but only if you have been advised by a contact lens clinician that your prescription is stable. Please also note there is no exemption from payment for spares.

Do you have any further questions?

For any queries related to your contact lenses including ordering replacements/additional lenses, handling or caring regime problems please email: rf.contactlenses@nhs.net. One of the specialist optometrists will aim to call you within one to two working days.

How to change your appointment

Contact lens clinics are held at the Royal Free Hospital. If you want to change or cancel your appointment, please call 020 7443 9757 or email: rf.contactlenses@nhs.net.

If your GP made the appointment through the 'choose and book' system please contact the general telephone appointment line on 0345 608 8888. Your GP should have advised you if this is the case. You can also cancel or change your appointment by going to: www.royalfree.nhs.uk and clicking 'Contact'.

If on the day of your appointment you need to contact the eye clinic, please use the following number:

- Royal Free Hospital appointments: 020 7443 9757

More information

For more information about the ophthalmology service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/ophthalmology

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net.

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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