

Teach patients proper soft lens care & handling

Unlike GP lenses which are quite durable and typically only break if they are pressed on too hard, soft contact lenses are more likely to tear during handling. While soft lens tearing is a common patient concern, lens damage can be minimized with just a little extra effort aimed at increasing patient awareness of proper handling techniques. As a contact lens specialist who handles all types of contact lenses throughout the course of a day, your in-office lens handling processes are likely second nature to you. However, be careful not to assume that your patients understand lens mechanics and care/handling specifics as well as you. A brief review of “best practices” presented to each patient can prevent most any lens from tearing, improving patient satisfaction and minimizing replacement lens costs.

Some lenses will tear easier than others and key factors include lens material and thickness. In general, the higher the water content of a lens, the easier it may rip or tear. And the thinner the lens, also the easier it may tear. So a thin and high water content lens is going to tear easier than a low water standard thickness conventional lens. Another factor is dryness. A dry lens splits easily, so make sure patients understand the importance of keeping their lenses fully hydrated. A lens that is out in the air will tend to dry very quickly, so remind patients to have their solution bottle handy and encourage them to use plenty of fresh solution and rinse each lens thoroughly upon insertion.

To avoid “pinching” lenses out of the case, instruct patients to pour soaking lenses out of their storage container into the open palm of their opposite hand. Patients with long nails are especially prone to tearing lenses. Remind them never to use their nails to pick-up or handle lenses, which can have the same damaging effect as a pair of sharpened metal tweezers.

If a lens folds into itself (so it’s shaped more like a taco than a bowl), tell patients NOT to peel it open. Instead, instruct them to put the lens in the palm of their hand and squirt it with a lot of fresh solution. The lens will typically roll open gently on its own.

Many patients tear a lens during the removal stage, which is often caused by a dry lens. Tell patients that lenses dry out on-eye, and teach them to use a rewetting drop before removing their lenses. If the eye and lens are well hydrated, they are less likely to tear the lens during removal.

And finally - a main culprit of damaged lenses is the lens case. When preparing to store their lenses, remind patients to insure that each lens is completely submerged in plenty of fresh solution and free floating in the center of the lens well before capping the case. If the lens is anywhere near the threads of the case when the lids are closed, edge damage will most likely occur.

Aside from feeling awful, wearing torn lenses can cause damage, so make sure patients understand the importance of careful lens handling and inspection before insertion. Insure patients always have a spare pair in the inevitable circumstance that handling damage does occur. While tearing a soft contact lens isn’t usually a tremendous problem, it can get costly for the patient if lenses are frequently torn during handling. By sharing these pointers, you are bound to help your patients save at least a few lenses in the coming years.

Additional care and handling resources for staff training and patient education can be found on the office resources page at www.artoptical.com.