

Contact lens legislation: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

In this FAQ, “contact lens optician”, “dispensing optician” and “optometrist” mean someone registered with the General Optical Council (GOC) as such. “Registered medical practitioner” means someone who is registered with the General Medical Council and holds a current licence to practise.

1. What is a contact lens fitting?

Section 25(9) of the Opticians Act 1989 (“the Act”) provides that fitting a contact lens means:

- assessing whether a contact lens meets the needs of the individual; and
- where appropriate, providing the individual with one or more contact lenses for use during a trial period.

Under section 25(1A(b)) of the Act, a fitting can take place only if the individual provides a spectacles prescription issued within the previous two years, and the fitting must begin before the re-examination date specified in the prescription.

2. Who can fit contact lenses?

Section 25(1) of the Act and the Contact Lens (Qualifications etc) Rules 1988 provide that contact lenses can be fitted only by an optometrist, contact lens optician or registered medical practitioner, with special provision for students under supervision.

A dispensing optician may fit contact lenses only under the supervision of an optometrist, contact lens optician or registered medical practitioner (or if they are training to be an optometrist or a contact lens optician).

3. What should happen on completion of a contact lens fitting?

Section 25(5) of the Act provides that a person who fits a contact lens must:

- on completion of the fitting, provide the individual with a signed written specification of each lens fitted, sufficient to enable the lens to be replicated,

unless, having carried out the fitting, they are of the view that a contact lens is not appropriate; and

- provide the individual with instructions and information on the care, wearing, treatment, cleaning and maintenance of the lens.

The decision on whether the fitting is complete is a clinical matter for the professional judgement of the practitioner. The professional bodies give guidance on this matter.

4. What should a contact lens specification contain?

The Contact Lens (Specification) Rules 1989 provide that a contact lens specification must contain the following particulars:

- the name and address of the patient (and date of birth if under 16);
- the name and registration number of the person signing the specification;
- the name and address of the practice;
- the date the fitting was completed;
- sufficient details of any lens fitted to enable a person who fits or supplies a contact lens to replicate the lens;
- the date of expiry of the specification; and
- such information of a clinical nature as the person fitting the lens considers to be necessary in the particular case.

5. Who can supply prescription contact lenses?

Section 27 of the Act provides that prescription contact lenses can be sold only to someone with a valid in-date contact lens specification. They can be sold:

- by or under the supervision of a dispensing optician, optometrist or registered medical practitioner; or
- (as long as the user is not under 16 or registered sight impaired / severely sight impaired) under the general direction of a dispensing optician, optometrist or registered medical practitioner, who need not be on the premises at the time, *if* the supplier first receives the original contact lens specification or verifies particulars of the specification with the prescriber.

If the user is under 16 years of age or registered sight impaired / severely sight impaired, prescription lenses can be sold only by or under the supervision of a dispensing optician, optometrist or registered medical practitioner.

Case law and our [standards of practice](#) require that the supervisor must be on the premises at the time of the sale, exercising their professional judgement as a clinician and in a position to intervene in the patient's interests.

6. Who can supply zero powered contact lenses?

Zero powered contact lenses are cosmetic, non-corrective lenses (i.e. without a prescription) to change the colour or appearance of the eye.

Section 27(1)(b) of the Act provides that zero powered contact lenses can be sold only by or under the supervision of a dispensing optician, optometrist or registered medical practitioner. Case law and our [standards of practice](#) require that the supervisor must be on the premises at the time of the sale, exercising their professional judgement as a clinician and in a position to intervene in the patient's interests.

7. What is aftercare advice?

Under section 27(3B) of the Act, the seller of an optical appliance (or zero powered contact lens) must make arrangements for the patient to receive such aftercare as may be reasonable.

Aftercare is not defined in the legislation, but can include providing the individual with instructions and information on the care, wearing, treatment, cleaning and maintenance of the lens (as per section 25 of the Act).

The College of Optometrists and the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) have produced guidance on aftercare.