

New hope for new contact lens wearers

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A new study suggests that prospective contact lens wearers will soon be offered more accurate predictions of the likelihood of success with their lenses

Research carried out by optometrists from Cardiff University and from Optometry and Vision Research in Weinheim, Germany has discovered a new and effective way of predicting which new contact lens wearers will have problems with their lenses. Currently it is widely accepted that many contact lens wearers give up on their lenses, with discomfort being the major reason for dissatisfaction. Since contact lens wear is relatively expensive, many prospective wearers are reluctant to commit to the financial investment required for contact lens wear if the success of their experience is uncertain. The research allows these prospective contact lens users to consider contact lens wear with much greater confidence that their experience will be successful

Contact lenses give many people with poor vision the freedom to carry out activities that others take for granted, such as dancing and playing sports. They can also enable people with particularly poor vision to avoid having to wear thick, heavy spectacles and so live life with more confidence. So discomfort from contact lens wear is a significant problem and can seriously curtail the way people live their lives. In the UK, one study showed that 52% of contact lens wearers stopped using lenses because of discomfort; in Germany 30% of users drop out in their first year of use. The principal symptoms described by patients are similar to those found with patients suffering from dry eyes. The increasingly wide choice of lenses (soft lenses, rigid gas permeable lenses and the new range of silicon hydrogels) have greatly improved the comfort of contact lens wear, through technical advances in the lens materials. Nevertheless, the problem of discomfort persists.

Up until now, it has proved very difficult for optometrists fitting contact lenses to predict which wearers will suffer from discomfort. The research has shown that a combination of clinical tests can be carried out which will predict the potential discomfort of contact lens wear for any patient with an accuracy of 91%. Given the numbers of contact lens wearers, this is a very significant development; there are 3.4 million contact lens wearers in the UK (7% of the population), and that figure would be much higher if new wearers could approach contact lenses with confidence in their ability to reap the benefits of contact lens wear without having to put up with any associated discomfort.

Notes for editors:

- The European Council of Optometry and Optics is the European organisation which represents the interests of optometrists and opticians from 30 countries. It aims to

promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.

- This research was carried out by Dr Heiko Pult (www.heiko-pult.de) from Optometry and Vision Research, Weinheim, Germany, and Dr Paul J Murphy and Dr Christine Purslow, both from the School of Optometry and Vision Sciences, Contact Lens and Anterior Eye Research Unit, Cardiff University, Wales. It was published in *Optometry and Vision Science*, vol 86, no. 9

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