

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Can people who wear bifocals wear contact lenses?

Yes! People who need *bifocal* spectacles have a condition called "*presbyopia*." This visual condition can be corrected with *bifocal* spectacles as well as *bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lenses. Recent advances in materials and designs make these contact lens options more successful than ever before. The best way to determine if a patient is a good candidate is to have them visit with the contact lens professional in your office so measurements can be taken and a thorough evaluation completed.

What is presbyopia?

Presbyopia is a normal, natural vision change that everybody experiences as they mature. The first signs are usually noticed when people are in their 40s and they have difficulty seeing near objects as clearly as they did before. Most people first notice it when the print is very small or the lighting is dim. But, as the condition continues to progress, reading anything becomes difficult.

Inside the eye, there is a lens (called the *crystalline lens*) that actually changes shape to provide different powers, from up close to far away. As we continue to mature, the lens becomes less flexible and can't change shape as easily as it did before. What we lose is the ability to see objects up close. The good news is that this normal process of maturing can easily be corrected with *bifocal* spectacles or *bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lenses!

What contact lens materials are available for the patient who needs to wear bifocal spectacles?

There are generally two types of contact lens materials available; GP and soft. GP (gas permeable) contact lens materials are firm. Because they are firm, they provide excellent vision, are easy to apply and remove from the eye, are easy to handle and care for, and can last a long time. Also because they are firm, they may take a little while longer to adapt to once they are first applied to the eye. But, after a few days to a few weeks, comfort will be very good.

Soft materials are comfortable right away and are easy to get used to. Because the adaptation is very quick, they are a good option for those patients who only want to wear contact lenses on an occasional basis. However, because they are soft and often much larger than their GP counterparts, they can be more difficult to apply, remove and handle, more costly to care for, need to be replaced more frequently, and the vision is often not as sharp as it is with spectacles or GP contact lenses.

What contact lens design options are available for the presbyopic contact lens wearer?

Both GP and soft lens materials are available in a *multifocal* or *simultaneous* vision design. That means that light is delivered from near, distance, and intermediate objects to the *retina* simultaneously. It is a very natural means of vision and is an excellent choice for patients who need to see at all distances and are especially good for those patients who use a computer.

Only GP materials are available as *bifocal* or *alternating/translating* designs. These contact lenses look like a traditional style *bifocal* spectacle lens with one segment on top of the other. Traditionally, the top segment provides distance vision while the bottom segment provides near vision. *Bifocal* GP contact lenses do not provide intermediate vision, but they do provide very crisp near and distance vision. Trifocal lenses are also available.

Do bifocal and multifocal contact lenses work?

Absolutely yes! These special contact lenses can provide patients with vision for near objects, distance objects and everything in between. The best way to determine which lens material and design will work best is for the patient to come in for a thorough evaluation by the contact lens professional in your office.

Who are good candidates for bifocal and multifocal contact lenses?

Patients who can't see up close any longer because of *presbyopia* and who want to be free from their spectacles should be evaluated for contact lens options. If a patient expresses a desire to wear contact lenses and they have *presbyopia* they should be scheduled to see the contact lens professional for a thorough examination and evaluation.

Are there patients who are not good bifocal and multifocal contact lens candidates?

The short answer is, "Yes." But, there aren't any telltale signs that can be determined over the telephone. Instead, patients who are interested in wearing contact lenses instead of spectacles should be encouraged to set up an appointment with the contact lens professional. Only through the examination can it be determined whether or not the patient is an appropriate candidate.

Are GP or soft bifocal and multifocal contact lenses best?

Most patients can wear either GP or soft *bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lenses. The most important goal is to find the right lens material and design to fit each patient's unique, physical characteristics, visual needs and lifestyle expectations. For instance, GP contact lenses provide clearer, crisper vision and are also very healthy for the eye. For patients desiring the clearest vision and healthiest lens option, a GP lens is a great choice.

Is it difficult to get used to bifocal or multifocal contact lenses?

Adapting to *bifocal* or *multifocal* contact lenses visually is like getting used to the vision with *bifocal* or *progressive* spectacles and many patients have already worked through that process when they are fit with contact lenses. If a patient is wearing contact lenses for the first time, there may be some adaptation to the physical presence of the contact lens. Most patients can easily adapt to their new contact lenses in a few days to few weeks.

Do GP contact lenses hurt?

Absolutely not! No contact lens should ever hurt and if it does, it indicates that there is a serious problem. Most patients who are completely new to contact lenses in general or GP contact lenses more specifically will be aware of their contact lenses. But, that sensation will go away after a few days to few weeks and the contact lenses will be very comfortable.

How difficult are bifocal and multifocal contact lenses to apply and remove?

Bifocal and *multifocal* GP contact lenses are among the easiest lens designs to apply and remove. GP lenses can be easier to apply than soft contact lenses because they are made from a firm material that is easy to handle and because they are smaller than soft contact lenses. Removing GP contact lenses also tends to be easier than removing soft contact lenses since they are popped out of the eye with the eyelids rather than plucked from the eye with the fingertips. Patients need to be fully trained on the application and removal steps before they leave the office.

Are bifocal and multifocal contact lenses complicated to care for?

GP contact lenses are very easy to care for regardless of whether they are single vision or *bifocal* and *multifocal* designs. They do require daily maintenance as do all contact lenses that are removed on a daily basis, but the cost and number of steps to properly care for them are both very low.

How many office visits does it take to fit bifocal and multifocal contact lenses?

There is no doubt that *bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lenses are designed to correct a more complicated situation. That fact usually translates into more office visits. But, because of advances in designs and materials, it typically only takes one to two more visits than a regular contact lens fitting.

Do bifocal and multifocal contact lens wearers need spectacles?

Most definitely! While the vision with *bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lenses will be very good, there will be occasions when the vision with spectacles will be preferred. Having both contact lenses and spectacles assures the patient that they will always have the vision they need and expect available. But, there are other reasons that even a successful contact lens wearer should have a back up pair of spectacles. There will be times when it isn't appropriate to wear contact

lenses (eye infection, swimming) or it's more comfortable to wear spectacles (dusty environment, tired eyes), so having a back up pair is very important. It is also important to encourage patients who wear contact lenses to have a good pair of sunglasses on hand to offer protection from UV rays, a wind screen and comfort from glare.

Can patients with dry eyes wear bifocal or multifocal contact lenses?

As patients mature, their eyes can often get drier and this can make contact lens wearing less comfortable. But, with the right material, wearing schedule, care solutions and lubricating drops, even these patients can be successful. The only way to know for sure is to have the patient visit with the contact lens professional so additional testing and evaluations can take place.

Can you be too old to wear bifocal or multifocal contact lenses?

No way! *Bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lenses are made for patients over 40 who are experiencing the difficulties of seeing objects up close. You can't be too old, but you can be too young!

How much do bifocal and multifocal GP contact lenses cost?

It isn't possible to provide a definite number since there are so many variables. The fees are determined by the vision needs of the patient and the lens material and design that will ultimately work best for them. In order to quote an exact price, the patient will need to be evaluated by the contact lens professional in the office. To provide a patient with a general idea, the cost of *bifocal* and *multifocal* GP contact lenses is comparable to the price of a good pair of progressive spectacles.

Where can I get more information about specific lens designs and availability?

The www.GPLI.info website is a great resource for information on GP *bifocal* and *multifocal* contact lens options. It has a searchable database of GP lens designs and their specific parameter availability that can help every contact lens professional find the right lens for the right patient. Also, the lens consultants at your CLMA laboratory will be happy to answer your questions.

Where can I direct patients to get more information about GP lenses and presbyopic options?

The website www.contactlenses.org is designed for the contact lens patient and focuses on GP contact lenses.