

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

Avoiding an Eyesore: What to Know Before You Buy Cosmetic Contacts

Whether you plan to cap off a costume with a pair of cat-eye lenses or just want to switch your eye color from blue to violet for the day, cosmetic contacts — contact lenses meant to change the appearance of your eye rather than correct your vision — may seem like fun accessories. But even if they're just for fun, it's a good idea to take them seriously.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, wants you to know that all contact lenses, even those that are cosmetic, require a prescription. Businesses that sell cosmetic lenses without requiring a prescription are violating the law.

Why the legalities? Because lenses that don't fit correctly, or are not used and cared for properly, can cause problems like conjunctivitis (pink eye), scratches and sores on your cornea, or blindness.

If you're in the market for contacts of any kind, see an eye care professional for an eye exam and prescription. Your eye care provider must give you a copy of your prescription. Then, just like the millions of Americans who wear glasses or contact lenses to correct their vision, you're free to take it and your business to any other provider — an optometrist, ophthalmologist, dispensing optician, or seller, such as a specialty shop, large wholesale store, or online retailer.

When you're considering whether to buy your eyewear from your eye care provider or another seller, chances are you'll consider cost and convenience. The FTC recommends that you:

Get your prescription. Your eye care provider must give you a copy of your contact lens and eyeglass prescriptions — whether or not you ask for them. You are entitled to a copy of your eyeglass prescription at the end of your eye exam and your contact lens prescription when your fitting is complete. Fitting contacts may involve more than one appointment.

Keep your prescription. File it with your other medical records. Keeping your prescriptions current and in a convenient place can reduce delays in getting your eyewear.

Send your prescription for contacts. You may choose to buy contacts from a seller who's not your eye care provider. If you do, you may want to fax or send the copy of your prescription directly to the seller to expedite the process. In any case, the seller must verify your prescription with your eye care provider before filling your order. But you can start the process by giving the seller certain information about your prescription — for example, the type of lenses, their manufacturer, power, base curve, and diameter.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

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1-877-FTC-HELP

FOR THE CONSUMER

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