

FTC Consumer Alert

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

Before You Buy Cosmetic Contact Lenses

Changing the look of your eyes with contact lenses might sound more like a fashion choice than a vision decision. But even if the lenses you want are purely cosmetic and have no effect on your vision, you still need a prescription from an eye care provider to get them. Anyone who sells you lenses without your prescription is selling them illegally. That's important because contacts that don't fit can cause serious eye problems.

What Are Cosmetic Contacts?

Whether you're planning to cap off a costume with a pair of cat-eye lenses, get the big-eye look of circle lenses, or switch your eye color from blue to violet for the day, cosmetic contacts — contact lenses meant to change the way your eye looks rather than correct your vision — may seem like just another fashion accessory.

But all contact lenses — even purely cosmetic ones — require a prescription. Businesses that sell cosmetic lenses without a prescription are selling them illegally.

Why Get a Prescription?

Lenses need to fit your eye correctly. If they don't, or if they aren't used and cared for properly, they can cause problems like:

- conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- scratches
- sores on your cornea
- blindness

If you're in the market for cosmetic contacts, see an eye care professional for an eye exam and prescription. Don't do business with anyone who doesn't require one.

Getting Your Prescription Should Be Easy

Your eye care provider has to give you a copy of your contact lens and eyeglass prescriptions, even if you don't ask for them. You're free to take them and buy your eyewear elsewhere — from an optometrist, an ophthalmologist, a dispensing optician, or a specialty shop, large wholesale store, or online retailer.

To make shopping for contacts or glasses more efficient:

- **Get your prescriptions.** You're 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 (which could mean more than one appointment).
- **Keep your prescriptions.** File them with your medical records and keep them current so you have them when you need them.
- **Send your prescription.** The seller has to verify your prescription with your eye care provider to fill your order, but you might speed the process by sending or faxing information about the type of lenses, their manufacturer, power, base curve, and diameter.

For More Information

The FTC works 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 get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a video, *How to File a Complaint*, at ftc.gov/video to learn more. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.