

Consumers have important vision care rights

The Contact Lens Rule and the Eyeglass Rule



Approximately three out of four U.S. adults need some type of corrective lenses—either glasses or contacts. Americans spend billions of dollars each year on eye exams and eyewear. Yet millions of vision care consumers are unaware that they have important rights and protections from the federal government to ensure choice, competition and the right to their own prescription.

Vital vision care rules

Over the past two decades, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has issued two critically important vision care rules for consumers: the **Eyeglass Rule**, first issued in 1977 and updated in 2004, and the **Contact Lens Rule**, first issued in 2004 and updated in October 2020.

The purpose of both the Eyeglass Rule and the Contact Lens Rule is the same: to enable consumers to purchase their corrective lenses from the seller of their choice by giving them unimpeded access to their own prescriptions.

What the rules require

Under the FTC's Eyeglass and Contact Lens Rules, your eyecare practitioner (optometrist,

ophthalmologist or, in some states, optician) must:

- Give you your eyeglass or contact lens prescription automatically, without your having to request it. (You should receive your eyeglass prescription at the end of the eye exam. For contact lenses, you should receive it after the lens fitting is finalized, which could take more than one appointment, or entail your trying out some lenses for a few days.)
- Give you a copy of your prescription following your exam or fitting. You can't be charged a fee for your prescription, and you can't be required to purchase eyewear or other items to get it.
- Get your written or electronic signature on a form acknowledging that you received a copy of your contact lens prescription, or retain proof that a digital prescription was provided, and keep those records for at least three years. (This requirement only applies to prescribers who sell contact lenses or otherwise have a financial interest in the sale/purchase of lenses.)
- When providing an electronic prescription, get your signature acknowledging that you've been

given a digital copy of your prescription in a format that you can use, access, download and print.

- Respond to a request for an additional copy of the prescription, by you or your contact lens or eyeglass seller, within 40 business hours.

- Verify a prescription within eight business hours. (Online sellers should tell you how to send or upload a copy of your prescription. If you don't submit your actual prescription, you'll have to provide precise information about it, such as recommended lens brand, power, base curve, or diameter, etc. You'll also need to supply your prescriber's contact information so that the seller can verify the prescription. If your prescriber doesn't respond to the seller's request within eight business hours, the seller can sell you those lenses after the eight-hour wait time expires.)

- Provide a prescription that is valid for at least one year (or longer, if state law imposes a minimum of more than one year), unless the prescriber has a medical reason for setting a shorter expiration date.

The Contact Lens Rule and Eyeglass Rule take precedence over more lenient state laws.

Learn more about the rules

Understanding Your Prescription Rights for Glasses and Contact Lenses <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/understanding-your-prescription-rights-glasses-and-contact-lenses>

Contact Lens Rule updates: What they mean for you <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/06/contact-lens-rule-updates-what-they-mean-you>

FAQs: Complying with the contact lens rule <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/faqs-complying-contact-lens-rule>

Exercising your rights

Under the **updated** Contact Lens Rule (effective Oct. 16, 2020), the FTC requires prescribers to get and keep confirmation that they provided a copy of the contact lens prescription to their patients. (The requirement to automatically provide a copy of the prescription was often ignored in the past.)

If your prescriber does not comply with the requirements of the Rule—for example, by not giving you your prescription automatically, or by not supplying a copy or prescription verification within the required time frame—you can remind them of their obligations under the Contact Lens Rule or Eyeglass Rule.

You also can report the issue to the FTC online or by phone. To file a complaint online, click “Report Now” (<https://reportfraud.ftc.gov>) and choose “Health” in the list of complaint topics. While the FTC doesn't resolve individual issues, your report helps the agency investigate rule violations and could lead to enforcement action.

You also can file a complaint with your state's consumer protection agency if state law has been violated as well (<http://www.consumerservicesguide.org/resources/national/browse/location/>).

About this guide

Consumer Action has been working to protect critical consumer vision care rights. Visit Consumer Action's **Vision Action Center** webpage (<https://consumer-action.org/vision>) to learn about your corrective lens prescription rights, how online contact lens prescription renewal services work, view short videos and more.

Consumer Action is a member of the **Coalition for Contact Lens Consumer Choice**, a bipartisan coalition of consumer and taxpayer groups, companies and community groups fighting for vision care rights (<https://keepcontactlenschoice.com/>).

About Consumer Action

www.consumer-action.org

Through education and advocacy, Consumer Action fights for strong consumer rights and policies that promote fairness and financial prosperity for underrepresented consumers nationwide.

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