

CE Credit - Topic Review

Disrupting Contact Lens Dropout: Practice-Centered Factors That Influence Continued Wear

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Contact lens dropout rates remain a significant challenge in eye care, with up to one in four new wearers discontinuing use within the first year. This study, commissioned by the Contact Lens Institute and conducted by Prodege, surveyed 401 U.S. adults to identify factors influencing contact lens retention. The survey categorized participants into new wearers (less than two years) and long-term wearers (two or more years) to assess differences in satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and the impact of eye care practice interactions.

Results indicated a 19-point satisfaction gap between new (67%) and long-term wearers (86%), highlighting the need to improve early experiences. Key satisfaction drivers included comfort, visual quality, and convenience, while dissatisfaction stemmed from cost, handling, comfort, and vision issues. New wearers were more influenced by interactions with all practice staff, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support and education.

The study recommends proactive communication, personalized care, and lifestyle-centered prescribing to enhance retention. Addressing cost, handling, and comfort challenges through targeted actions can mitigate dropout risks. By fostering a supportive environment and leveraging the entire practice team, eye care professionals can improve patient satisfaction and promote long-term contact lens use.

INTRODUCTION

Contact lens dropout rates remain a persistent challenge in eye care. Despite advancements in lens technology and patient education, a substantial number of patients discontinue wear, particularly within the first two years. Previous research indicates that up to one in four new wearers abandon contact lenses within their first year,¹ representing a significant loss of benefits for patients and practices. The dropout dilemma has implications not only for patient vision and quality of life but also for the economic stability of eye care practices, as maintaining long-term contact lens patients can support revenue and referral goals.

This study builds on the Contact Lens Institute's (CLI) ongoing efforts to understand and address factors that not only attract new wearers, but also elements that retain current contact lens patients. By examining the behaviors, preferences, and needs of both new and long-term contact lens wearers, the research aims to provide evidence-based strategies and techniques to improve the likelihood of ongoing use. The ultimate goal is to offer practical recommendations that practices can implement across their entire staff—clinical, retail, and administrative alike—to foster lasting relationships with their patients.

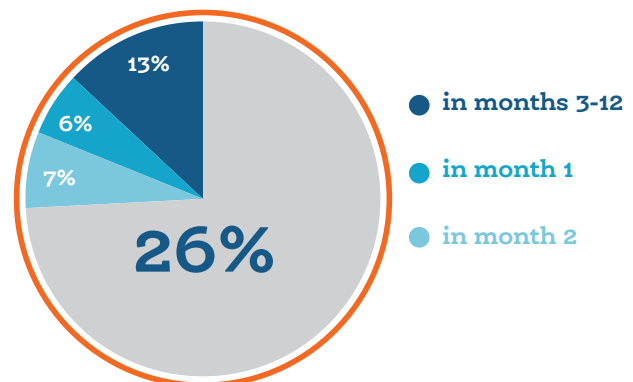


Figure 1: First Year Contact Lens Drop Out1

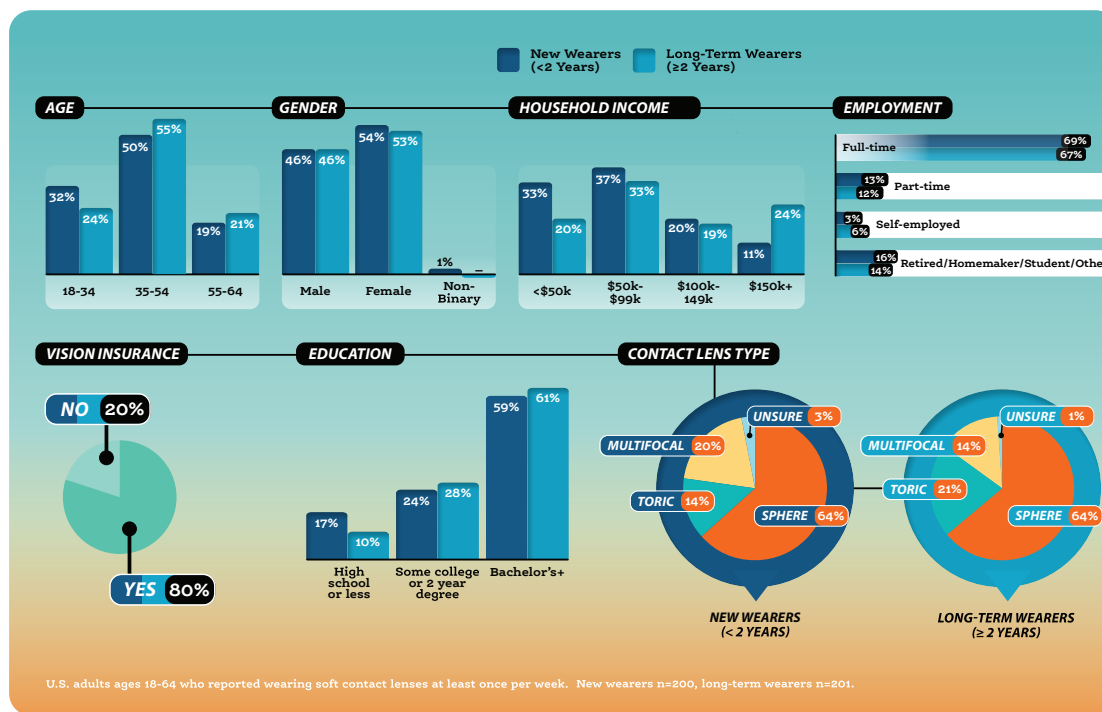


Figure 2: Respondent Overview

METHOD

The Contact Lens Institute commissioned a survey conducted by Prodege, a global research firm.² The online study took place from August 9-21, 2024, and involved 401 adults aged 18-64 residing in the United States. All participants reported wearing soft contact lenses at least once per week. Respondents were categorized into two groups: new wearers (NW: less than two years of wear) and long-term wearers (LTW: two or more years of wear) to help assess any differences between the populations.

The survey collected data on wearer satisfaction, sources of dissatisfaction, lifestyle factors affecting contact lens use, wear-and-care compliance, information sources, and purchase preferences, with particular attention toward understanding the role of interactions with eye care practice staff, including optometrists and ophthalmologists, opticians, technicians, optical/retail staff, and administrative staff.

Participants represented a wide spectrum of demographics, including varying age groups, income levels, educational backgrounds, and geographic regions. Approximately 80% of respondents had vision insurance.

RESULTS

Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

The study illustrated a significant difference in satisfaction levels between new and long-term wearers. Among new wearers, 67% reported being highly satisfied with their contact lenses, compared to 86% of long-term wearers. This 19-point gap highlights an opportunity to improve the early experiences of new contact lens users. The primary drivers of satisfaction were identified as comfort (NW: 61%, LTW: 69%), visual quality (NW: 51%, LTW: 67%), freedom from glasses (NW: 46%, LTW: 61%), and convenience (NW: 46%, LTW: 51%). These factors underscore the importance of selecting contact lenses that prioritize comfort and vision, while also suggesting that lifestyle benefits carry considerable weight.

Dissatisfaction was most frequently attributed to cost, handling, comfort, vision, and convenience. Notably, new wearers were more sensitive to these issues, with 49% citing cost as a primary concern compared to 41% of long-term wearers. Handling challenges were also more pronounced among new wearers (40% vs. 32%), emphasizing the need for thorough training and support during the initial fitting process. Comfort and vision concerns were cited by 39% and 35% of new wearers, respectively, compared to only 19% of long-term wearers. These findings suggest that new wearers require a higher level of education and reassurance to mitigate dropout risks.

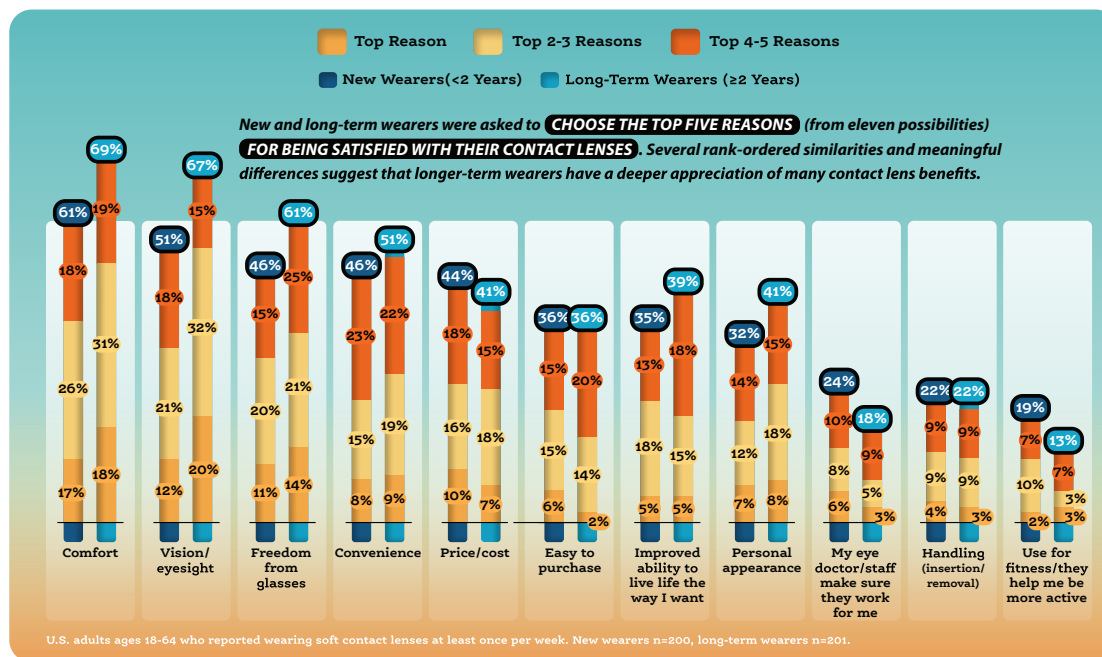


Figure 3. Drivers of Contact Lens Satisfaction

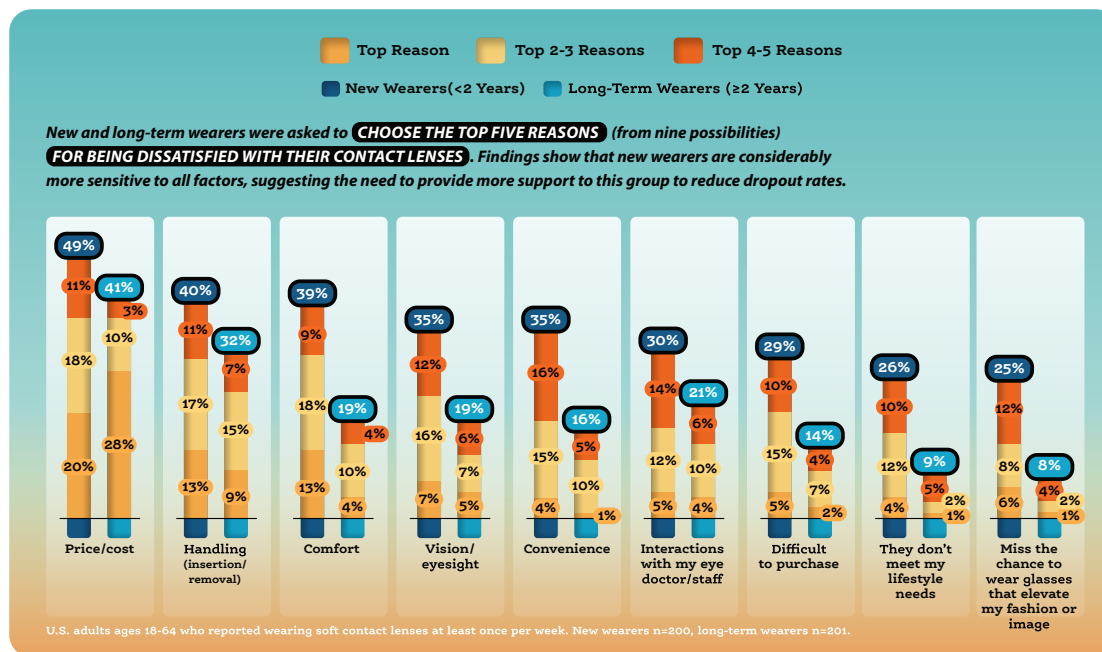


Figure 4. Sources of Contact Lens Dissatisfaction

KEY INFLUENCES ON CONTINUED WEAR

Affirming the influence of the entire eye care team was another significant outcome. New wearers were more heavily influenced by interactions with all members of the practice, from administrative staff to optometrists. For example, 74% of new wearers said their eye doctor had a significant impact on their decision to continue wearing contact lenses, compared to 59% of long-term wearers. Similarly, opticians were rated as more influential by new wearers. So too were technicians, optical staff and

administrative staff—at 18 to 27 points higher than for long-term wearers—which reflects that impact that every member of the practice team can have on contact lens retention during the formative months of wear.

Non-clinical factors also play a role, as 61% of new wearers and 40% of long-term wearers stated that understanding how contact lenses extremely or greatly improve their lifestyles impacts their choice to continue use.

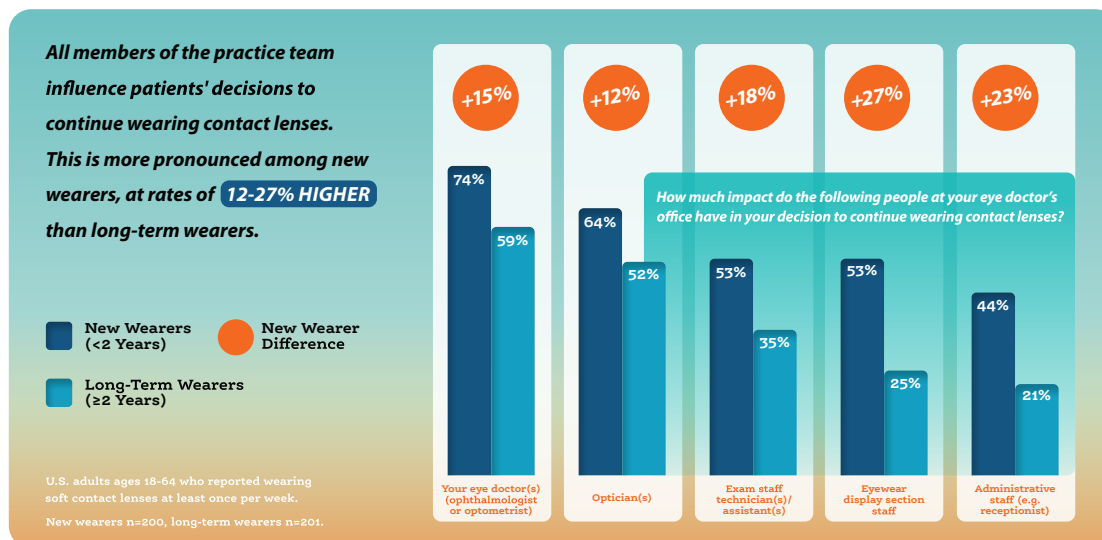


Figure 5. Practice Team Influence

Respondents were presented with a dozen lifestyle factors that would motivate them to press forward if confronted with a contact lens wear challenge. Four emerged as the most important among both segments: allowing freedom from glasses (NW: 48%, LTW: 49%), confidence in having the best possible vision (NW: 39%, LTW: 43%), better comfort than glasses (NW: 38%, LTW: 46%), and greater convenience compared to glasses (NW: 37%, LTW: 49%).

DISCUSSION

Practice Team Understanding & Education

Because patient interactions across the practice staff spectrum play a crucial role in retention, particularly for new wearers, nurturing understanding of individual and group impacts within the entire team takes on more importance. A coordinated approach to demonstrating proper lens care, providing trial lenses, and post-appointment follow-up can

significantly influence patient decisions to continue wear. While many of these aspects could be categorized as basics (fundamentals of contact lens wear?), doing so may lead to undervaluation by the exam staff, who may not realize significance placed on each by patients.

The data also highlights the need for practices to adopt a proactive communication strategy. This includes reinforcing the benefits of contact lens wear and addressing any concerns promptly.

The fact that new wearers are more impressionable—that group reported higher impacts across all 20 doctor and staff interactions posited in the survey—underscores the importance of treating neophytes more sensitively. An action or lack thereof that a longer-term wearer might dismiss as inconsequential could drive a less experienced wearer to back away from contact lenses.

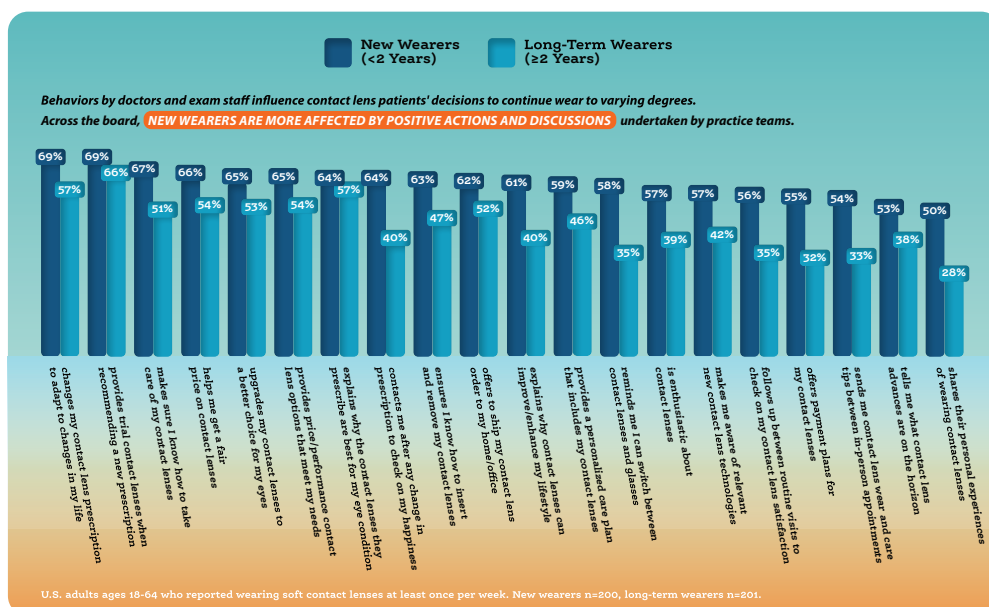


Figure 6. Influences on Continued Contact Lens Wear

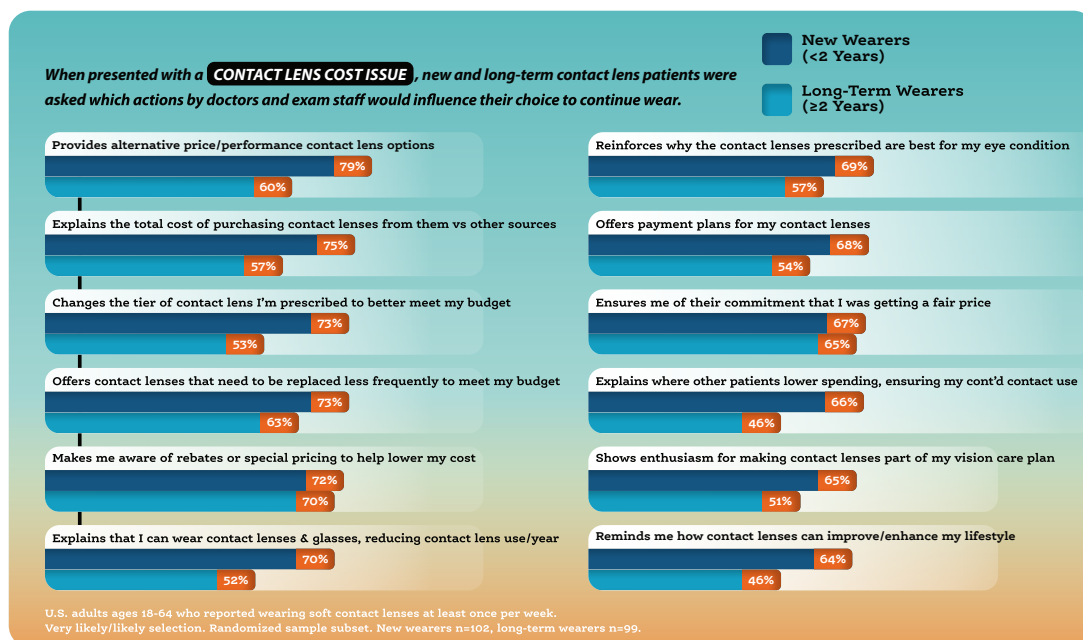


Figure 7. Addressing Cost Challenges

ADDRESSING COST, HANDLING, COMFORT AND VISION CHALLENGES

With cost, handling (insertion/removal), comfort and vision being the top four detractors among new wearers, the study surveyed respondents to determine what actions by practice teams would most likely persuade them to continue use.

Although new wearers most likely had not encountered contact lens pricing before, they also indicated the greatest openness to behaviors that help overcome cost concerns, ranking them higher by double-digit percentages compared to long-term wearers for 10 of 12 potential actions. Leading the way was providing alternative price/performance options (79%), suggesting that staff prescribe what is clinically appropriate while having other possibilities ready to share. In addition, should cost be an issue, seven in ten or more new wearers said they would like staff to explain

the total cost of purchase from the practice versus another source (75%), change the type of prescribed contact lens to better meet a budget (73%), offering lenses with longer replacement schedules (73%), pointing out rebates (72%), and reducing contact lens use by alternating wear with glasses (70%).

While handling was the second most-cited detractor, respondents also believed that their practices could effectively address insertion and removal problems. Top-rated actions specified by new wearers included quickly scheduling an in-person appointment (77%) or telephone/video consultation (76%), providing additional in-person training (74%), and offering a contact lens with better handling characteristics (74%). Do not overlook the power of simply instilling confidence: 75% said that assurances from the practice team would encourage them to keep trying.

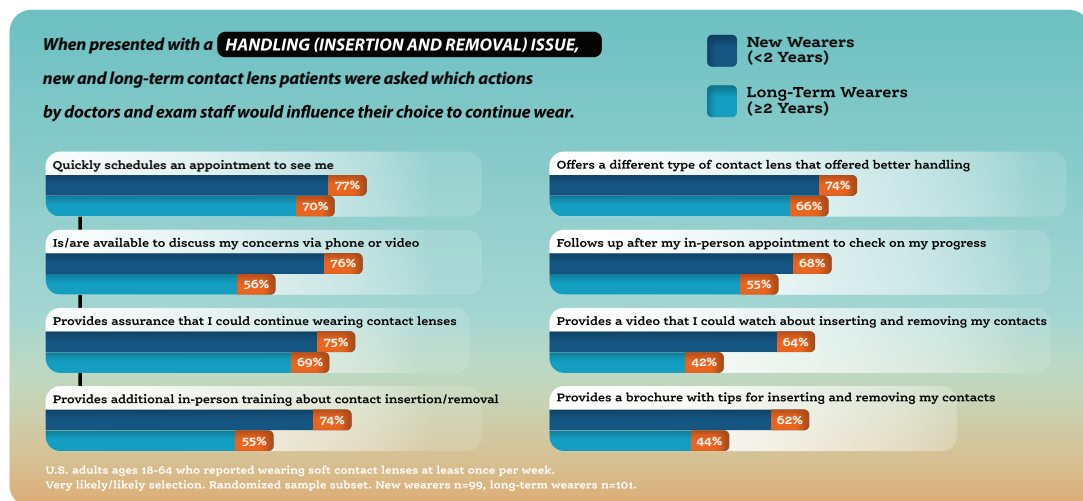


Figure 8. Addressing Handling Challenges

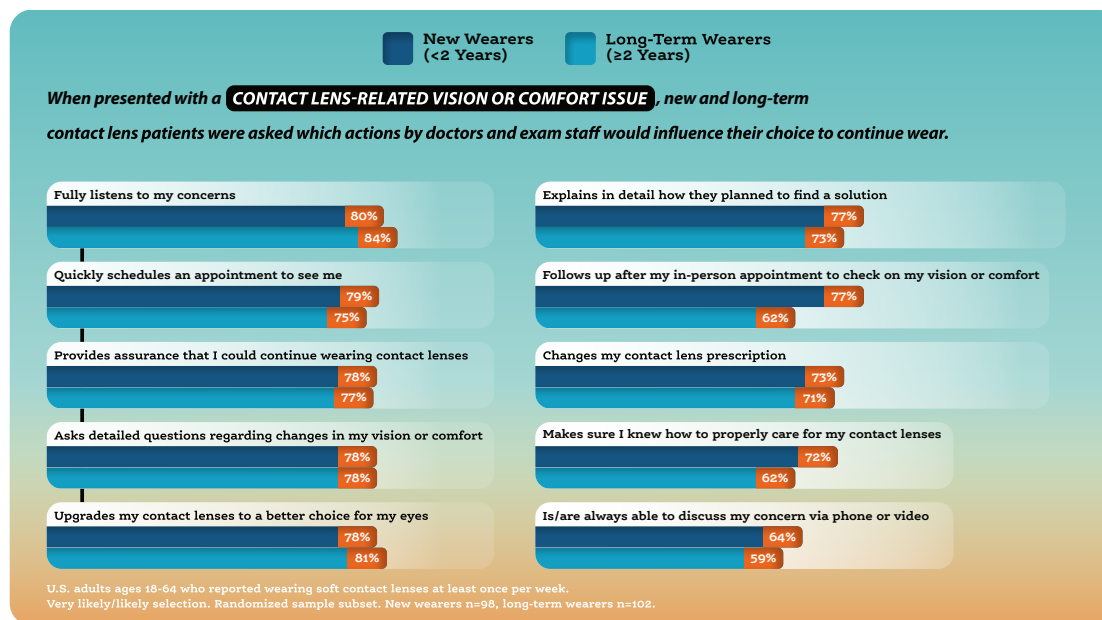


Figure 9. Addressing Vision and Comfort Challenges

When it comes to comfort and vision, a range of practice actions were found to be impactful for continued contact lens use among new wearers. Being heard—i.e., “fully listening to my concerns”—was rated as the top behavior, with 80% of respondents choosing that from among 10 possible options, closely trailed by positive reinforcement / assurance (78%), asking detailed questions about the issue (78%) and explaining plans to find a solution (77%). New wearers also were much more interested in proactive post-exam outreach—77% said they would appreciate follow-up to check in regarding vision and comfort. These interactions not only reinforce proper lens wear and care but also strengthen the patient-practice relationship, which may encourage greater loyalty.

COMPLIANCE AND FOLLOW-UP

Compliance with lens replacement schedules is a well-known challenge in contact lens care. The study found that 74% of new wearers adhered to their eye care professional’s instructions, compared to 65% of long-term wearers. This decline over time suggests that regular reminders and education are necessary to maintain healthy wearing habits, helping veteran contact lens users from becoming complacent. Practices can leverage automated systems to send follow-up reminders and provide a regular stream of information about lens care and replacement schedules—gentle, unobtrusive yet valuable prompts.

LIFESTYLE-CENTERED PRESCRIBING

With lifestyle benefits showing a clear impact on the choice to use contact lenses, practices have the opportunity to address these benefits. For example, patients who spend long hours on digital devices may benefit from lenses

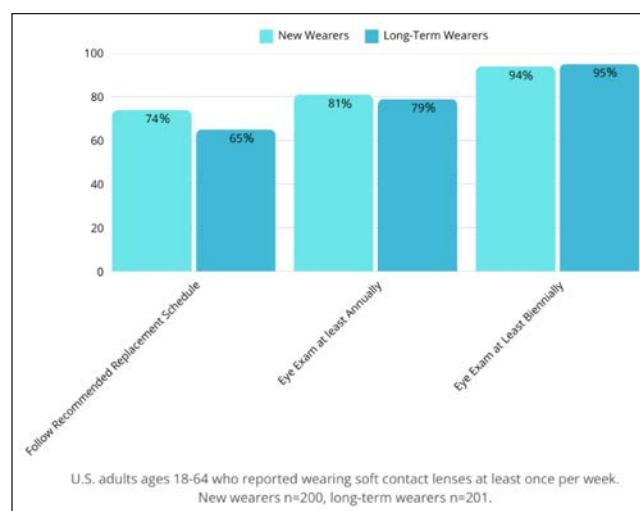


Figure 10. Compliance with Healthy Behaviors

designed to reduce eye strain, while athletes may require lenses that remain comfortable during physical activity. This personalized approach can make contact lenses more appealing and increase the likelihood of continued use.

The study also found that long-term wearers were more likely to appreciate certain lifestyle benefits of contact lenses compared to new wearers, such as providing greater comfort (+8%) and convenience (+12%), as well as knowing that contact lenses help respondents live life the way they want (+8%). This suggests that benefits like these may not be immediately apparent to newly-fit patients, so practice staff could place greater attention on them when discussing contact lens use.

CONCLUSIONS

Contact lens dropout has been a challenge for decades, regardless of geography, practice setting, or other variables that may lend themselves to a solution. While some eye care professionals have adopted a “that’s the way it is” sentiment, the findings from this study offer valuable insights into methods that can create real change.

This new research builds on prior studies, identifying why both new wearers and long-term wearers choose to continue contact lens wear. By isolating the benefits and identifying detractors, everyone involved in the care spectrum—from doctors to administrative staff—can better understand their role in facilitating success. It’s important to not understate the crucial nature of the entire team in this process. Investing in staff training and creating a supportive environment for patients—especially those new to contact lenses—has the potential for measurable returns.

The data also demonstrates the importance of proactive communication, comprehensive education, and personalized care. Acknowledging how the needs of new and long-term wearers may differ, eye care professionals can implement more targeted strategies that foster trust and promote long-term relationships.

Among those are lifestyle-centered prescribing, tailoring recommendations to each patient's daily activities and preferences to increase the perceived value of contact lenses. Paired with straightforward ways to counter issues with cost, handling, comfort and vision, these can become a recipe to turn merely satisfied patients into contact lens enthusiasts for both clinical and practice success.

REFERENCES

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2. Contact Lens Institute. (2024). *Disrupting the dropout dilemma: Practical steps to keep patients in contact lenses*. Online fieldwork conducted by Prodege, August 9-21, 2024.