

CE Credit - Survey/Report

Decoding Generational Preferences in Contact Lens and Eye Care for Practice

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ABSTRACT

Perception of contact lens wear and eye care differs by generation. A study commissioned by the Contact Lens Institute and conducted by Prodege surveyed 1308 vision-corrected residents from the United States and Canada from July to August 2025. The participants were divided into three generational cohorts: Gen Z (ages 15-28), Millennials (ages 29-44) and Gen X (ages 45-60) to assess how different ages affect habits and attitudes in contact lens decisions and eye care. Results indicate that Gen Zs wear contact lenses less than previous generations, and generational differences exist in rationale for wearing contact lenses. Furthermore, it highlights that what motivates one generation's eye care choices may not necessarily be the same as those of other generations. These insights into what influences Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X are valuable in helping the eye care community attract new contact lens patients, as well as increase patient satisfaction and meet patient needs through targeted communication and education.

INTRODUCTION

There are an estimated 45 million people in the United States wearing contact lenses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While the global contact lens market has seen continued growth in the last few decades, with advancements in technology and increased options coming to the market yearly, the total number of contact lens wearers has not grown comparably.^{1,2} Previous studies have suggested various reasons for this, including contact lens dropout and attracting new patients³ however, no studies have assessed the current values and perceptions of the current contact lens wearing individuals, and how it may steer the contact lens industry.

The Contact Lens Institute (CLI) works to understand the factors affecting the contact lens landscape and contact lens wearers. This study explores how different ages affect habits and attitudes in contact lens decisions and eye care.

METHOD

The Contact Lens Institute commissioned a survey conducted by Prodege, a global research firm. The online study surveyed 1308 vision-corrected participants in the United States and Canada from July 30 to August 19, 2025. The respondents were divided into three generational cohorts: Gen Z (n=657, ages 15-28), Millennials (n=330, ages 29-44), and Gen X (n=321, ages 45-60).

The survey collected data on vision correction preferences between glasses and contact lenses, contact lens wearing rationales, the appeal of technology advancement in contact lenses, values driving purchasing decisions, perceived lifestyle benefits of contact lenses and social values affecting eye care decisions. The data was then sorted based on generational cohorts and trends were assessed.

RESULTS

Vision Correction Preferences

Between the three cohorts, Millennials used contact lenses the most (43%), followed by Gen Z (35%) and Gen X (2%). There were eight percent fewer Gen Zs wearing contact lenses as compared to Millennials. Additionally, among those who wore both glasses and contact lenses, Gen Z used glasses more than Millennials and Gen X (Gen Z: 52%, M: 45%, Gen X: 49%) (Figure 1A, Figure 1B).

Contact Lens Wearing Rationale

Among contact lens wearers, the rationale for wearing contact lenses varied between generations. Gen Z and Millennials ranked personal appearance as the top reason for contact lens wear (Gen Z: 52%, M: 50%), whereas Gen X ranked it fourth (40%), after freedom from glasses, no visual obstruction, and better comfort.

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Following personal appearance, Gen Z's top three reasons for wearing contact lenses were lifestyle-related, with freedom from glasses ranking second (47%) and no visual obstruction ranking third (38%). In comparison, Millennials' reasons for wearing contact lenses were more related to physical attributes, with better comfort and ease of use ranking equally in second place (48%) (Figure 2).

Technological Advancement in Contact Lenses

New contact lens technologies and features inspire Gen Z and Millennials significantly more than Gen X. Overall, Gen Z and Millennials responses were similar, favoring UV absorption/protection (Gen Z: 52%, M: 55%), reusable contact lenses (Gen Z: 49%, M: 50%), torics (Gen Z: 49%, M: 49%), and contact lenses designed for device use (Gen Z: 47%, M: 49%). Conversely, Gen X responses were over 10 points lower in valuing these technological advancements compared to younger generations.

For Gen X, multifocal contact lenses for presbyopia were the highest-ranked category (36%), which, despite being in the age group that would benefit most from this technology, was lower than that of Millennials (41%) (Figure 3).

Values Driving Purchasing

All three cohorts were driven most by affordability/value (85-89%), convenience of purchase (69-73%), and speed to obtain the product (66-71%).

Other values of brand authenticity (Z: 63%, M: 63%, X: 54%) and individual expression (Z: 58%, M: 55%, X: 45%). Brand social responsibility (Z: 51%, M: 47%, X: 33%) and Living for today (Z: 48%, M: 48%, X: 39%) were especially more valued in Gen Z and Millennials, as compared to Gen X (Figure 4).

Authenticity ranked fourth among all values surveyed. All cohorts valued authenticity in their eye care professional, however, when it came to interactions with the eye care practice team, Gen X rated authenticity highest (51%), more than Gen Z and Millennials by 12 points.

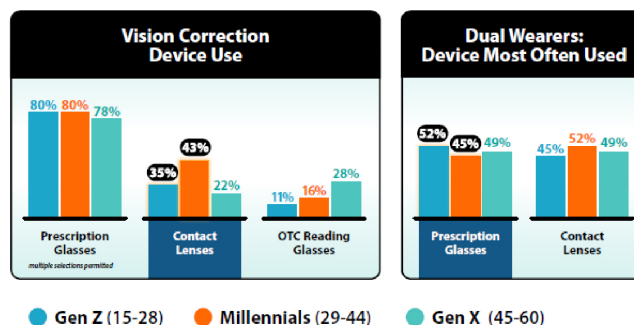
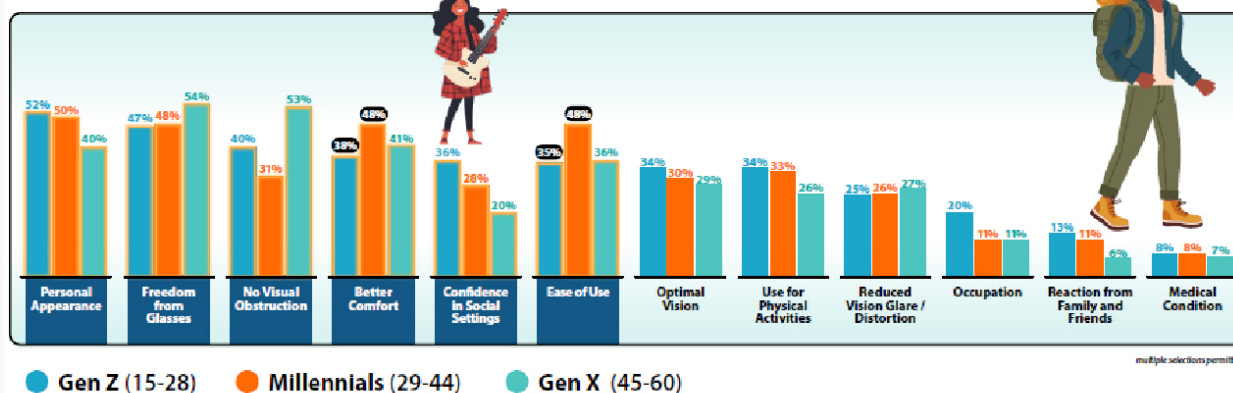


Figure 1A: Vision correction device use, Figure 1B: Dual wearers: Device most often used

Reasons for Contact Lens Wear: Generational Comparisons

THE APPEAL OF CONTACT LENSES CAN DIFFER BETWEEN GENERATIONS, REVEALING TARGETED OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER ENGAGE AND EDUCATE CURRENT AND POTENTIAL WEARERS ON WELL-ESTABLISHED BENEFITS.

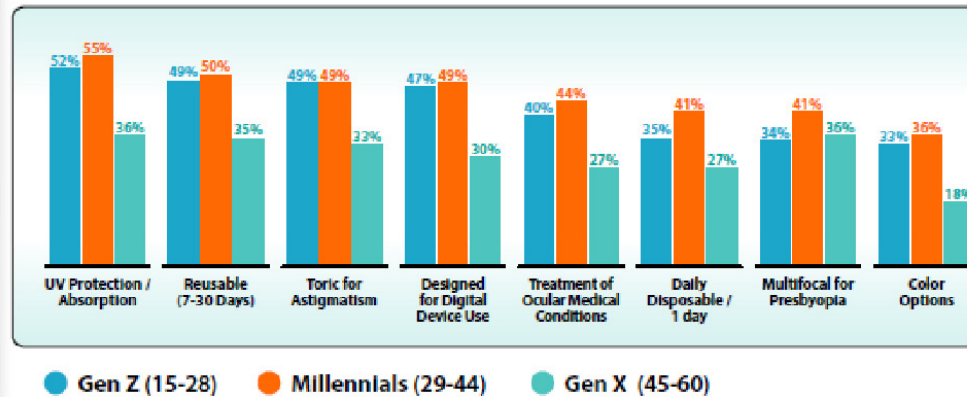


Online fieldwork conducted by Prodege for Contact Lens Institute from July 30-August 19, 2025, among U.S. and Canadian vision corrected respondents ages 15-60. Contact lens wearers n=443 (Gen Z=232, Millennials=141, Gen X=70). Q. What are all the reasons you wear contact lenses?

Figure 2: Reasons for Contact Lens Wear: Generational Comparisons

Contact Lens Advancements Inspire Younger Generations

NEW CONTACT LENS TECHNOLOGIES AND FEATURES INSPIRE GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE THAN GEN X, SUGGESTING TOPICS TO HELP BETTER CONNECT WITH POTENTIAL AND CURRENT WEARERS.

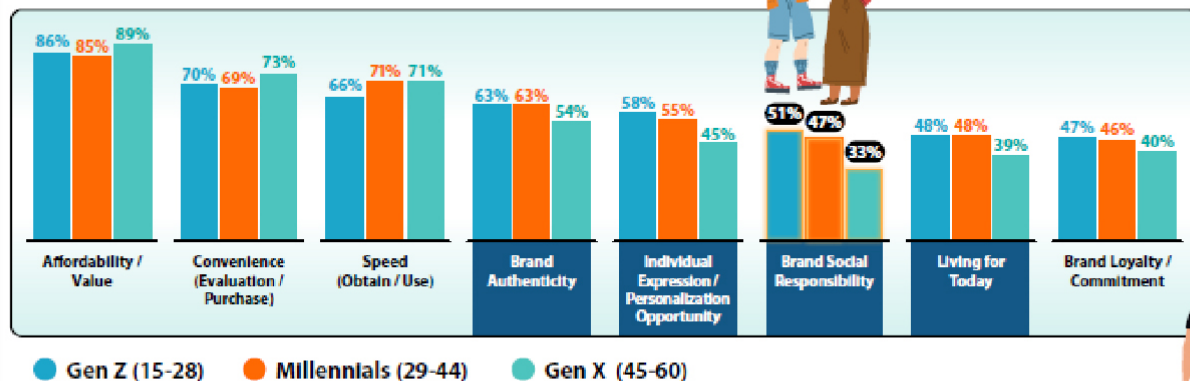


Online fieldwork conducted by Prologis for Contact Lens Institute from July 30-August 19, 2025, among U.S. and Canadian vision corrected respondents ages 15-60. Total sample n=1,308 (Gen Z=657, Millennials=330, Gen X=321). Q. Please indicate your interest in the following types of advancements in contact lens technology. Combined extremely / very interested selection shown.

Figure 3: Contact Lens Advancements

Generationally-Differentiated Purchase Drivers

SEVERAL GEN Z AND MILLENNIAL PURCHASE INFLUENCES ARE DISTINCTIVE FROM GEN X's, OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES TO UNIQUELY REACH THESE PATIENTS.



Online fieldwork conducted by Prologis for Contact Lens Institute from July 30-August 19, 2025, among U.S. and Canadian vision corrected respondents ages 15-60. Total sample n=1,308 (Gen Z=657, Millennials=330, Gen X=321). Q. How Important are each of the following factors when you're considering the purchase of any type of product or service? Combined extremely / very important selection shown.

Figure 4: Generationally-Differentiated Purchase Drivers

DISCUSSION

The eye care community has a strong influence on contact lens wear for patients and can deepen trust and relationships by more actively discussing contact lenses.⁴ This study highlights the multiple layers of preferences and

values involved in contact lens decisions and satisfaction in eye care, and the commonalities and differences existing between generations. Focusing communication based on contact lens and eye care preferences for each generation should be the first step to helping patients gain the most satisfaction with their contact lenses.

Gen Z

This study highlights how Gen Z values self-expression and makes choices driven by social values and innovation. Interestingly, Gen Zs choose to wear glasses over contact lenses more often than older generations and are 8% less likely to wear contact lenses compared to Millennials. This gap in contact lens wear provides an opportunity for discussion. This study suggests that communication with Gen Zs should focus on goals to meet their needs for individual expression and authenticity. The choice of contact lenses also matters, as Gen Zs value higher technological advances, brand authenticity, and social responsibility. Sharing the value of contact lenses to enhance personal expression, understanding their lifestyle, and sharing contact lens innovations that meet their experiences, as well as tailoring prescribing to their lifestyle, is how eye care professionals can meet the values of Gen Z.

Millennials

Of all cohorts, Millennials were most likely to wear contact lenses. Personal appearance and personal authenticity were the biggest appeals to wearing contact lenses, with improved comfort (compared to glasses) and ease of use also ranking highly. Like Gen Zs, technological advancements and social responsibility matter to Millennials. This study suggests that focusing contact lens discussions on tolerance and handling of lenses is important for assessing existing Millennial contact lens wearers. As Millennials approach the age of presbyopia, focusing discussions on contact lens advancements, technologies, and multifocal designs can also ensure that Millennials' needs are being met.

In this study, both Gen Z and Millennials embrace self-expression, personal appearance and technology. This suggests an opportunity for practices to share the latest advancements in contact lenses and eye care, including the ability to incorporate myopia control, color filtering contact lenses, and dry eye management for the right patients, further tailoring care based on needs.

Gen X

Gen X wore contact lenses the least out of all cohorts. For Gen X, lifestyle benefits of freedom from glasses and no visual obstructions led to the appeal to wear contact lenses over glasses. Despite being older, with expected ocular surface changes and demands of presbyopia, Gen X did not value technological advancements in contact lenses as did younger generations. Instead, authenticity of interactions with eye care professionals and perceived value and affordability of contact lenses were ranked extremely important. For Gen Xs, offering personalized, authentic interactions while focusing contact lens assessments on function and value would ensure the best patient satisfaction while making sure their needs are best met.

For all generations

Eye care professionals often consider contact lenses a refractive correction. Interestingly in this study, all cohorts ranked optimal vision in the middle, whereas other lifestyle and personality values more highly as reasons to wearing contact lenses (7th in rank for Gen Z, 6th in rank for Gen X and M). This important detail is a reminder that perfect vision isn't necessarily the goal for our patients. Personalizing recommendations for our patients' goals, including appearance and convenience, may instead be more valuable.

For patients across all generations, emphasizing the value and affordability of contact lenses helps meet the biggest driver of contact lens purchases. Additionally, all cohorts value contact lenses that can be purchased conveniently with a quick turnaround time to receiving lenses. For practices, this means that contact lens discussions should continue outside the exam room and practices should be equipped to efficiently process contact lens transactions.

CONCLUSION

Approximately one in six individuals wears contact lenses in the United States. This study highlights how these contact lens wearers perceive contact lenses and eye care, and shares commonalities and differences in perceptions between generations of contact lens wearers. Between Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X, differences in values impact their choices and lifestyles. Understanding these preferences can help eye care professionals reframe their approaches to meet patients' needs more effectively, allowing for better patient satisfaction and continued contact lens wear.

As the global eye care market continues to grow, eye care professionals have a role in educating patients about contact lens options and ensuring satisfaction for existing wearers. Previous studies have shown that the eye care community is a strong and trusted influence on contact lens wear in patients.⁴ Having insight into the values of patients based on generational preferences allows eye care professionals to tailor discussions to what matters most to patients. This allows for stronger doctor-patient relationships, attraction of new contact lens wearers, and more positive contact lens outcomes, which further lead to retention in contact lenses and practice growth.

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