

Internet Purchases of Contact Lenses and Glasses

Purchasing Glasses Online

Ordering eyeglasses online may seem easy, but it is very different than ordering your average consumer item. It is important to know that optometrists are not only university trained in medical eye care, but also in the proper manufacturing, fitting, measurement, and dispensing of eyewear.

When ordering online, the untrained consumer is, in essence, taking on the role of a trained optical dispenser. This includes taking critical measurements and making critical decisions with respect to frame, lens and material selection. There is an inherent risk associated with making these determinations without the proper skills and education.

All consumers should be made aware that there are a number of factors that go into converting an eyeglass prescription into a quality optical device that provides clear, comfortable vision. These include:

- Proper measurement of your interpupillary distance (PD) at both distance and near focal points.
- Accurate measurement of the optical centres (OC) in order to avoid eyestrain and pulling.
- Determination of the most appropriate type and index of lenses given your prescription as well as work and lifestyle demands.
- Proper education and selection of tints and coatings for your lenses to best suit your lifestyle or work environment.
- Appropriate base curve determination to control magnification, especially in cases where there is a difference between the curvatures of your eyes.
- Proper selection of frame size, eye size, bridge width, temple length, shape, wrap, material, and overall fit to ensure good comfort and vision with minimal distortion and cosmetically acceptable lens thickness.

When you receive your glasses, a trained optical dispenser should ensure that they have been properly manufactured, are within acceptable tolerance, and fit your face correctly to ensure ideal vision. Poorly manufactured or poorly fitted glasses can cause eye strain, headaches, pulling, and blurred vision.

A September 2011 study found that 44.8% of eyewear ordered online FAILED at least one parameter of optical or impact testing. In addition, 28.6% were out of optical tolerance. The study can be viewed at <http://www.optometryjaoa.com/article/S1529-1839%2811%2900406-4/abstract>.

As a consumer, you have a number of choices when it comes to purchasing eyewear, including online. Working with your optometrist from the initial eye exam to the final fitting will ensure you receive accurate, quality manufactured eyewear that is best suited for your eyes and your lifestyle.

Contact your optometrist for more information regarding your eyewear needs.

Purchasing Contact Lenses Online

Purchasing contact lenses online is not without its risks. It is important to remember that every contact lens product is unique and designed for a particular purpose. This includes everything from material, curvature, fit, oxygen permeability, deposit resistance, moisture content and lifespan.

Just because you have a prescription (new or old) does not mean you will get the appropriate product for your unique eyes. It is important to remember that contact lenses are medical devices that sit directly on your eyes and can cause problems if improperly fit or monitored.

There are a number of risks associated with online ordering:

- Some sites do not verify the prescription. Without proper verification, one risks wearing an optically incorrect or improperly fitting lens.
- Many online sites (including those based in Canada) sell product that has not been approved by Health Canada. The safety of these lenses has not been tested.
- Lenses from overseas may be exposed to large temperature changes in uncontrolled warehouses or transportation vessels. This can affect the integrity of the lenses which can lead to potential eye health issues.
- Overseas distribution channels may have grey market (counterfeit) product. There are no controls to ensure that internet sites only source lenses directly from the manufacturer.
- Replacement and exchange privileges may not be possible with an online vendor.

By working with your optometrist, you can ensure:

- The proper contact lens prescription, curvature, and modality based on lifestyle needs, and measurements of your eye curvature, tear chemistry, and prescription.
- The appropriate selection of care system based on compatibility with different lens materials and compatibility with your eyes.
- Professional monitoring to ensure optimum eye health, good vision, and comfortable wear.
- Updates with new lens technology that may better suit your particular vision needs or lifestyle demands.

The SAO advises those who wish to purchase online to follow these guidelines:

- Order only from trusted sites that source their lenses directly from the manufacturer.
- Report any differences from the original packaging to your optometrist.
- Seek immediate care if you experience any discomfort or vision change.
- Use only the care system recommended by your eye care professional.
- Ensure you see your optometrist annually to monitor the health of your eyes.

Contact your optometrist for more information regarding your contact lens needs.