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## Contact Lenses

Study: patient compliance

# Many FRCL wearers 'stretch' prescribed replacement intervals

By Cheryl Guttman Krader

Reviewed by Sheila B. Hickson-Curran, BSc (Hons), MCOptom, FAAO

**Orlando, FL**—The majority of patients wearing frequent replacement contact lenses (FRCL) are not compliant with their prescribed replacement schedule. This problem of “stretching” (waiting >1 week beyond the recommended replacement time) appears to be worse among patients wearing a monthly lens than in those with a 2-week replacement schedule, according to the results of an online survey reported at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Optometry.

### Take-Home Message

According to an online survey of wearers of 2-week or 4-week silicone hydrogel or hydrogel contact lenses, fewer than half of respondents replaced their lenses as directed. The rate of waiting >1 week beyond the recommended replacement time was significantly greater among patients in the 4-week group.

Johnson & Johnson Vision Care sponsored the survey. However, the participants were randomly selected from a panel of U.S. consumers who volunteered to take part in online surveys about a variety of products and were unaware that the information in this survey was being sought by a contact lens manufacturer.

A total of 448 consumers wearing two-week replacement contact lenses and 197 consumers with monthly replace-

ment contact lenses provided answers to a series of questions about replacement frequency.

The results showed that only 43% of patients who were prescribed a 2-week replacement lens and only 36% of patients prescribed a 4-week/monthly replacement lens were complying perfectly with the prescribed schedule ( $p = NS$ ).

Minor stretching was identified among 65% of persons in the 2-week replacement group and 55% of those in the 4-week replacement group ( $p = 0.02$ ), whereas 4% of patients in the 2-week group and 23% of those in the 4-week/monthly group displayed extreme stretching (waiting  $\geq 8$  weeks) to replace their lenses ( $p < 0.01$ ).

“There continues to be debate in the industry about the optimum replacement schedule for soft contact lenses,” said Sheila B. Hickson-Curran, BSc (Hons), MCOptom, FAAO, Director of Medical Affairs, VISTAKON, Division of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc.

### Taking sides

“While there is good science to suggest that more frequent replacement is better for optical performance, patient comfort, and ocular health, there are advocates for a longer replacement interval based on the idea that reduced frequency of replacement would improve replacement

compliance,” Hickson-Curran said.

“The results of this survey reaffirm that noncompliance with prescriber’s instructions is an important issue among contact lens wearers,” she continued. “They are also consistent with the old adage, ‘Give ‘em an inch and they’ll take a mile.’ It’s counterintuitive that patients who are noncompliant with a 2-week replacement schedule will be more adherent to instructions if allowed to wait 4 weeks to change lenses.

“Furthermore, noncompliance with a 4-week replacement schedule may put patients on a slippery slope leading to significant problems,” Hickson-Curran said.

“Therefore, when noncompliance with frequent replacement is an issue, switching to single-use lenses is probably a better alternative because there are good data to show that vision, comfort, and safety are best with these products that avoid the need for cleaning/disinfection solutions, storage cases, and remembering about replacement.”

### More honest responses?

Hickson-Curran noted that the high rates of extreme stretching admitted to by patients in the survey was a bit surprising, but pointed out that it is important to consider that the survey was designed to elicit the information in a neutral setting, which supports the veracity of the data.

“Contact lens wearers who are asked about compliance through a survey they



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receive at an office visit or by mail from their eye-care provider may be reluctant to disclose that they are not adhering to the instructions they received. The methodology for the online survey removed the contact lens wearers from the clinical setting with the assumption that they would be more likely to provide truthful responses," Hickson-Curran explained.

She acknowledged that the results of this survey conflict with other studies that show better replacement compliance with extension of the replacement interval. The difference may be explained in part

by differences in the setting for conducting the survey. Differences in criteria for defining both eligibility in the 2-week and 4-week replacement groups and definitions of what constitutes noncompliance may also be contributing factors.

"Contact lens wearers were included in the 2- and 4-week groups in this survey only if they were specifically told by their eye-care provider to replace their lenses after 2 and 4 weeks, respectively," Hickson-Curran said. "In other surveys, patients were stratified based only on the specific lens they were wearing. That methodology does not account for the possibility that the prescriber either instructed the patient to follow a different replacement interval or failed to provide explicit directions and so essentially gave permission for stretching."

While in the current survey, participants were divided into three compliance groups based on the difference between their directed replacement frequency and the one they followed (perfect compliance, minor stretching, and extreme stretching), other surveys did not subcategorize patients based on how delinquent they were in replacing their lenses.

Focal Point

When noncompliance with frequent replacement is an issue, switching to single-use lenses is probably a better alternative. Data show that vision, comfort, and safety are best with these products, which avoid the need for cleaning/disinfection solutions, storage cases, and remembering about replacement.

"From a clinical perspective, minor stretching of the replacement interval, which we defined as up to 1 week, is probably inconsequential. However, patients are more likely to suffer deleterious consequences when stretching becomes more extreme," Hickson-Curran noted.

The survey findings should also remind clinicians that they must re-educate patients at each follow-

up visit about elements of proper lens care, including about the importance of complying with recommended replacement frequency.

Various aids are available to help patients adhere to their prescribed replacement schedule, including Acuminder (VISTAKON) [www.acuminder.com](http://www.acuminder.com), which is one of several online reminder tools. **OP**

FYI

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Hickson-Curran is employed by VISTAKON, Division of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc. Johnson & Johnson Vision Care sponsored the survey.