

# Keeping an eye on your wallet

People who wear long-life contact lenses are paying over the odds for lenses that are the same as cheaper, daily disposable ones

Contact lens makers market their products as suitable for either daily or longer wear, but a *Which?* investigation has found that in most cases the lenses are virtually identical. The only real difference is the price: daily lenses cost around £1 a pair whereas long-life lenses are nearly £6 a pair.

This means that the 1.4 million people who use weekly or monthly contact lenses are spending as much as £190 a year more than wearers who simply clean and reuse their daily lenses.

Manufacturers Bausch & Lomb and Johnson & Johnson were taken to court, in 1998 and 2001 respectively, by US customers who claimed they'd been misled into thinking the firms' one-day lenses were different to their more expensive, longer-life alternatives. Both paid out millions of dollars to settle the cases.

Johnson & Johnson has told *Which?* that its 1-Day Acuvue and longer-life Acuvue 2 lenses are made of the same material, but differences in design, thickness, shape and size mean they are suitable to be worn only for the specified time.

We asked a contact lens maker with 30 years' experience to compare data published by five lens manufacturers on the materials and dimensions of their disposable lenses. We also consulted an optician with 30 years' clinical experience.

Our experts agreed that daily lenses from four of the manufacturers were virtually the same as their longer-life ones: they were made of similar material with only slightly different diameters, thickness and curves.

Our contact lens maker said he found no evidence that the 1-Day Acuvue lenses couldn't be worn for longer. 'If someone using Acuvue 2 used 1-Day Acuvue instead and followed the recommended care regime, they could expect the daily lenses to last as long as the longer-life product,' he said.

Bausch & Lomb said its Soflens Comfort monthly lens contains a more advanced material than its daily One Day one. But our expert said the label shows the Comfort has the same basic chemistry as the One Day but contains slightly less water.

Water content affects how much oxygen a lens lets through to the eye. But data shows that the difference in water content between these two

products has no impact on the amount of oxygen reaching the eye, or on their ability to withstand repeated handling. With proper care, he added, a one-day lens would be expected to last as long as a monthly one.

Coopervision's Biomedics 1-Day and longer-life Biomedics 55UV and Frequency 55 lenses have 'virtually identical fitting characteristics, thickness and material', according to our expert. 'I would regard them as interchangeable,' he said.

Our expert also found Sauflon's daily New Day and monthly Clear Comfort lenses identical, from material and dimensions to manufacturing process.

Ciba Vision was the only maker of completely different daily and monthly lenses. Its daily lenses are made of a more fragile material and in a different way from the monthly ones.

But eye expert Professor Roger Buckley, honorary consultant ophthalmologist at London's Moorfields Eye Hospital, warned: 'Using daily lenses longer than they have been licensed for is not a good idea at all.'

'If contact lenses are not worn according to professional advice, they are capable of harming, even blinding, the eye. Opticians who recommend a use other than the licensed one run the risk of disciplinary action by the General Optical Council and possibly even criminal proceedings.'



**ADVERTISED**  
for 1 month's supply  
30 pairs of lenses  
**£27.60**

**WORN AS NEEDED**  
for 1 month's supply  
1 pair of lenses  
**92p**

## EYE HEALTH

Manufacturers told us that daily disposables are the healthiest way to wear contact lenses but that the best lenses for a particular consumer should be determined by his or her eyecare professional.

Research has shown that there is an increased risk of eye inflammation from wearing monthly ones, but our contact lens expert said the risk of serious infection in either case is relatively small and shouldn't put consumers off wearing monthly lenses. In fact, most opticians prescribe monthly lenses.

Wearers should ensure that they always follow the proper rules for cleaning their contact lenses.

## Contact lenses

### MANUFACTURER

Johnson & Johnson 1-Day Acuvue  
Johnson & Johnson Acuvue 2<sup>a</sup>

Bausch & Lomb Soflens One Day  
Bausch & Lomb Soflens Comfort

Coopervision Biomedics 1-Day  
Coopervision Biomedics 55UV

Ciba Vision Ciba Focus Dailies  
Ciba Vision Focus Vistint

Sauflon New Day  
Sauflon Clear Comfort

Costs	
Price per pair	Annual difference <sup>b</sup>
92p £4.63	£192.92
72p £4.25	£47.52
75p £4.25	£42
62p £5.83	n/a
from 70p from £3.30	from £31.20

<sup>a</sup> Worn weekly <sup>b</sup> Cost of 12 monthly, or 52 weekly, pairs minus cost of 12 daily pairs