



CONTACT LENS SPECIALIST

According to the National Institutes of Health, approximately 45 million people in the U.S. wear contact lenses. This represents about 1 in 6 Americans. Contact lenses correct astigmatism, nearsightedness, farsightedness, and other vision issues and are considered medical devices and require a prescription.

The global contact lens market is experiencing significant growth, with projections indicating a continued increase in demand for both standard and specialty lenses. Specialty lenses are often necessary for individuals with corneal irregularities, such as keratoconus, severe eye surface disease like dry eye, those needing to correct post-refractive surgery issues, or those who experience discomfort or ineffectiveness with conventional lenses.

Specialty lenses include toric lenses for astigmatism, scleral lenses for dry eye and corneal irregularities, and multifocal lenses for presbyopia. In addition to

addressing specific conditions, specialty lenses can also serve cosmetic purposes, such as colored lenses, and improve the overall quality of life for individuals with certain visual impairments.

While all optometrists can prescribe and fit contact lenses, specialized optometrists have a deeper understanding of different types, their applications, and specific fitting challenges. They are experts in fitting and dispensing both conventional and specialty contact lenses, using advanced techniques and technology to assess the need for contact lenses, determine their

appropriateness, and prescribe and fit various types. In addition to fitting and dispensing lenses, these optometrists are skilled in diagnosing and treating eye diseases.

Training

Specialty contact lens fitting is a specialized area within optometry, often requiring a higher level of expertise. It involves dedicated training to fit and manage various types of contact lenses for complex eye conditions.

Most optometry schools offer comprehensive contact lens training as part of their curriculum with courses covering topics like lens design, fitting methods, care and handling, and patient education. Students also gain hands-on experience through supervised clinical rotations, fitting patients with various contact lens types.

Some optometry schools offer one-year residencies focused on advanced training in corneal diseases and specialty contact lenses. Residency programs, especially those focusing on cornea and contact lenses offer extensive training in fitting and managing specialty lenses. Some institutions also offer fellowships in medical contact lenses, providing advanced training in specific areas like ocular surface disease and complex refractive errors. Optometrists can also continue their education through conferences, workshops, and online courses to stay updated on the latest techniques and lens designs



Resources

Both of these resources offer free online resources, including videos and webinars.

- **Scleral Lens Education Society**
<https://sclerallens.org/>
- **Gas Permeable Lens Institute**
<https://gpli.info/>



Why choose this path?

Specialty lens fitting is a very rewarding and fulfilling career pathway. Aside from providing career differentiation and developing an expertise in a well-sought career path, the impact on patient's lives is beyond rewarding. With the use of various types of specialty lenses, i.e., scleral lenses, you have the ability to transform a legally blind person to almost perfect vision or someone with extreme pain, to no pain, immediately after lens application. To affect patients' lives in this manner is a privilege and for that I will always be very grateful – it is the fuel that keeps me going.

Karen G. Carrasquillo, OD, PhD

Senior VP, Clinical and Professional Affairs, BostonSight

Board Member, Latinos en Optometry
NEEDAM HEIGHTS, MA