A word from the wise: CLCS Legends section
Managing the high astigmatic patient with contact lenses

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Successful practitioners want their patients to leave their practice with better vision and improved contact lens comfort than when they entered. New options for your patients are always available in the marketplace. The key to improving your patient’s quality of contact lens wear is discovered during the case history portion of the exam. Your dialogue investigates the problem areas present in your patients’ everyday contact lens experience. This might sound simple but is very elusive. Frequently, patients cannot articulate or do not know the problems that they are experiencing unless you specifically question attributes about their comfort and vision. This is more common in the highly astigmatic patient than in any other visual anomaly. Most of these patients understand that they have a difficult prescription because they have been told numerous times before by other practitioners. This runs the gambit from “your prescription is not available in contact lenses” or “the problems that you’re having cannot be corrected any better because of your astigmatism.”

Astigmatic prescriptions can be corrected by a variety of lens modalities, each having their benefits and disadvantages. Make sure you recognize the extent of the patient’s astigmatism by topography. A limbal to limbal astigmatism (Figure 1) can have a very different fitting outcome compared to central apical astigmatism (Figure 2).

Here are some things to consider when fitting the high astigmat:

- Custom soft lenses can be made in any power, any base curve, and a variety of stabilization methods, either in a disposable replacement schedule or reusable lens design. Remember that soft lenses are made out of water and are typically less pristine than a rigid lens, due to the material.

- Rigid lenses are highly customizable. They can be fabricated in a front, back, or bitoric lens design and a variety of diameters. Don’t be afraid to piggyback these gas permeable lenses to provide the comfort that your patient is looking for.

- Scleral gas permeable lenses vault over the cornea entirely, neutralizing the corneal astigmatism while landing on the conjunctiva to provide improved comfort compared with small diameter lenses, due to reduced lid interactions.

- Hybrid lens designs might be your answer to provide comfortable lens wear, as well as provide clear vision.
Try not to force a particular lens design onto your patient just because it might be the best visually producing lens if the comfort might limit the patient’s wearing time. These patients want to wear their lenses comfortably all day and your job is to provide the contact lens option that meets their expectations. Remember, if you do not satisfy your patient’s needs, they will be looking for a practitioner who can.

References:
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Dr. Davis is co-founder of EyeVis Eye and Vision Research Institute. Dr. Davis is Diplomate in the American Academy of Optometry and an inductee in National Academy Practice in Optometry. Dr. Davis has published and lectured extensively on topics related to Contact Lenses, Eye Care and the management of eye disorders. He is an adjunct faculty member of Illinois College of Optometry, University of Alabama, Salus University College of Optometry and Southern California College of Optometry. He has developed many contact lens designs and holds various contact lens patents. Dr. Davis has extended his experiences as a consultant to a variety of EyeCare companies, as well as investment firms.

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