

# Novartis, Google join hands to develop 'smart' contact lens

Zurich, July 15: Swiss drug-maker Novartis has struck an agreement with Google to develop "smart" contact lenses that would help diabetics track their blood glucose levels or restore the eye's ability to focus.

The device for diabetics would measure glucose in tear fluid and send the data wirelessly to a mobile device, Novartis said. The technology is potentially life-changing for many diabetics, who prick their fingers as many as 10 times daily to check their body's sugar production.

Success would allow Novartis to compete in a global blood-sugar tracking market that is expected to be worth over \$12 billion by

2017, according to research firm GlobalData. Diabetes afflicts an estimated 382 million worldwide.

The second approach is for presbyopia, in which aging eyes have trouble focusing on close objects. Novartis hopes the lens technology will help restore the eye's ability to focus, almost like the autofocus on a camera.

Non-invasive sensors, microchips and other miniaturised electronics would be embedded into the contact lenses. Under the deal with Google, Novartis's Alcon eyecare unit will further develop and commercialise the lens technologies designed by Google, the American company's development team.

Financial details were not disclosed. The alliance comes as drugmakers explore ways for technology to reshape health-care, helping patients monitor their own health and lowering the costs of managing chronic diseases.

In turn, technology firms such as Apple, Samsung and Google are trying to find health-related applications for wearable devices. Novartis chief executive Joe Jimenez said he hoped a product could be on the market in about five years. "This really brings high-technology and combines it with biology and that's a very exciting combination for us," Jimenez said. *Reuters*

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