

The Eye Examination

We all rely on our eyes and good eyesight in almost every aspect of our daily lives. Access to information through reading or television depends on clear vision, while life itself can depend on the ability to see properly while driving, or just walking in busy streets. Yet a significant proportion of people don't have their eyes examined at regular intervals, while many people have never had an eye examination.

Why?

Part of the reason is that eyes, unlike teeth, don't normally let you know in an obvious way when something is wrong. Often, because sight deterioration can be very gradual, people genuinely don't notice that they are not seeing as well as they could. Regular examinations are important as the sooner a vision problem is detected, the greater the chance of successful treatment - this is particularly true with young children and the elderly. More than just identifying whether your eyesight needs correcting, the eye examination can reveal a number of other underlying health problems such as high blood pressure or diabetes. It is a vital health check that should be part of everyone's normal health regime.

Unless otherwise advised, you should have an eye examination every two years. It may be necessary to have them more frequently, depending on your age and medical history. An eye examination is carried out by an optometrist or ophthalmic medical practitioner and usually takes about 20-30 minutes.

This is what you can expect it to include:

Discussing your needs

It is very important that your practitioner knows why you are having your eyes examined. It may just be your routine check-up or you may be there for a specific reason such as VDU screening. If you are having an eye examination because you are experiencing problems with your eyes or vision your practitioner will need to know what symptoms you have, how long you have had them and whether any changes have happened suddenly, or slowly over a period of time.

Your medical history

You must also tell your practitioner if you are taking any medication. He should also be aware of other medical information, such as whether you suffer from headaches, currently wear spectacles or contact lenses, or have any close relatives with a history of eye problems.

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The Eyecare Trust is a registered charity that exists to promote awareness of all aspects of eye health. For more information call our public information line on 0845 129 5001 or log on to www.eyecaretrust.org.uk



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Examining the Eye

Your eyes will be examined both internally and externally. This will enable an assessment to be made of the general health of your eyes and identify any other underlying medical problems. The interior of your eye will be examined using an instrument which shines a light through the pupil, allowing a detailed examination of the internal structures. Other tests frequently carried out are, for example, those for glaucoma or colour vision deficiencies.

Your vision

Measurements will be taken of your vision when you are not wearing spectacles or contact lenses to assess the extent of any visual error. If the examination shows that you could benefit from vision correction the practitioner will ask you to look through a variety of trial lenses and ask you to express an opinion on the effect that the lenses have on the quality and clarity of your vision.

Eye Movements & Co-ordination

It is essential that these are checked to make sure that both eyes are working together effectively and that undue stress is not being placed on them. This is particularly important for those who use VDUs.'

Lifestyle

Additional information which will help your practitioner to make an accurate assessment of your requirements is, for example, your occupation, whether you play sports or have any hobbies. Your practitioner will now have a detailed knowledge of the health of your eyes, how good your vision is, and any special requirements you may need. This information will be explained to you, but remember, if you don't understand anything or require more information please ask your practitioner who will be delighted to help.

At the end of the eye examination you will be advised of the appropriate date for your next appointment and be handed your spectacle prescription, or a statement which confirms that nothing is needed. If you receive a prescription you may wish to select spectacles or be fitted with contact lenses. This may be done with the assistance of an optometrist or a dispensing optician. You can purchase your spectacles where you had your eyes examined or from any other optician. When you choose spectacles or contact lenses you will want to be sure they are suitable for your lifestyle, comfortable to wear and attractive.

To help you make the best choice your practitioner will gladly offer advice on

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the following points:

Frame Selection

Fashion and image are important factors, but you should also choose a frame that's compatible with the lenses you need, as well as one that's made from a suitable material. Advice will also be available on the frames most suitable for your face shape and colouring. Don't be afraid to experiment or try on as many pairs as your wish.

Lens Selection

Advice will be given on the most suitable lens for your particular requirement. They can be made thinner, lighter, flatter, anti-reflective, tinted, photochromic and in plastic or glass. Most optometrists and some dispensing opticians can supply low vision aids. When you collect your new spectacles, they will be checked and the fitting adjusted to ensure your comfort and clearest vision. As part of the continuing aftercare your optician will be happy to adjust or make minor repairs to them. If you have any problems with your spectacles or contact lenses, please make sure you contact your practice as soon as possible.

NHS Entitlements

Those in the following categories are entitled to an NHS eye examination without charge and may also be entitled to a voucher to offset the cost of any spectacles or contact lenses prescribed:

- Children under 16, or under 19 still in full-time education
- All those 60 and over
- People receiving Income Support or Family Credit
- Those receiving a disability working allowance who have capital up to a certain amount (please check with your practitioner for current details)
- Those receiving an income-based jobseekers allowance (Contributory ISA does not count) Diabetics
- Glaucoma sufferers
- Those who are 40 and over and the parent/brother/sister/child of a

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person with glaucoma

- Those diagnosed by a consultant ophthalmologist as being at risk of developing glaucoma
- The blind and partially sighted
- People entitled to NHS complex lens vouchers
- Those who have a valid HC2 certificate

If you have a problem

If you are dissatisfied with the service or conduct of your optical practitioner you should try to resolve any difficulties directly with the practice. In most cases your problem will be successfully resolved without difficulty. If you cannot reach an amicable agreement with your practice you can refer the matter to your local Trading Standards Officer or local Health Authority via your practitioner (NHS patients only). Alternatively, you may refer to one of the following bodies:

Optical Consumer Complaints Service,
PO Box 219,
Petersfield
GU32 9BY.

www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk

If your complaint involves serious professional misconduct then your complaint can be referred to:

The General Optical Council
The Registrar
41 Harley Street
London
W1N 2DJ.

Find out more about eye examinations with this downloadable leaflet that will tell you all you need to know. [Click here to download.](#)

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last updated 08 February 2012

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