

Who's who in your optical practice



Optical practices — known as opticians or optometrists — differ in size, as well as in the number and type of staff they have. The practice you visit may be a small independent business with one premises or a store that is part of a national group with a larger team. In every practice that offers sight tests, an optometrist will be present. Every sight test is tailor-made depending on your needs and the methods your optometrist prefers to use. (See the note below.)

Your optometrist

Your optometrist is a highly skilled professional who will thoroughly examine your eyes. During a sight test, your optometrist will test your vision as well as the health of your eyes, prescribing glasses and contact lenses where necessary.

Their qualifications

Optometrists have extensive training for at least four years and must be registered with the General Optical Council (GOC), the governing body. Some optometrists take higher qualifications to allow them to treat common eye conditions or prescribe medicine for conditions affecting the eye and surrounding tissues.

Many optometrists fit contact lenses, dispense glasses and provide specialist services, such as home visits, and provide safety glasses and sports vision eyewear.

Your dispensing optician

If you need glasses, and the practice has a dispensing optician, they are trained to provide you with the most suitable lenses, coatings and frames for your requirements. They will measure the distance between your pupils to make sure your glasses work as well as possible for you and also give you advice on the best use and care of your glasses.

Their qualifications

Dispensing opticians complete academic and practical training over at least three years and must be registered with the GOC. Many dispensing opticians take on further training to fit contact lenses and provide low-vision aids to people who are partially sighted.

The support team

Members of the support team, including receptionist staff, optical assistants and clinical assistants, work under the direction of the practice manager and are often your first point of contact when you visit the practice. Support staff make sure that any necessary paperwork is completed before you see the optometrist. The support team is highly trained and can advise on suitable glasses and lenses, as well as instruct you on how to use your contact lenses safely. They may also have been trained to carry out some clinical tests but the results will be looked at by the optometrist.

Other eye-care professionals

After a sight test your optometrist may ask the advice of another healthcare professional.

- You may be referred to another optometrist for further investigation into certain symptoms – this could save you a visit to your hospital eye department.

Continued overleaf

About the AOP

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists and other optical professionals in the UK. We support our community of more than 16,500 members to fulfil their professional roles to protect the nation's eye health. Find more information at www.aop.org.uk/patients



Who's who (continued)

- Sometimes you may be referred to your GP for health tests, such as a check on your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, or to screen for diabetes.
- If you need treatment for common eye conditions, such as cataracts, you may be referred to a specialist in eye disease called an ophthalmologist.
- For problems relating to the eye muscles or visual development, you may be referred to an orthoptist.

Note:

If you're in Scotland, a sight test is called an eye examination and will include extra services on top of those carried out elsewhere in the UK.

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