

Get your eyes tested now

By [Andre Horn](#)

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As National Eye Care Awareness Month ends on 20 October 2014, it is important to go for that eye test, as blindness can be averted through early detection and treatment.



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Regular eye examinations are important, regardless of one's age or overall health. During an eye test, an optometrist does not just examine the quality of one's vision, whether one needs spectacles or contact lenses or an adjusted prescription, it will also include a general health check for any eye injuries, abnormalities and early signs of eye conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration.

Optometrists are often the first health care professionals to detect chronic systemic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes and cholesterol. One's eyes will also be checked to see how they work together as a "team".

For all ages

Eye examinations are an important part of health maintenance for everyone. Adults should have their eyes regularly tested to ensure that their prescriptions are current and to check for early signs of eye disease.

Eye examinations for children play an important role in ensuring normal vision development and academic achievement. Vision is closely linked to the learning process. Children with undetected vision problems often will have trouble with their schoolwork. Many times, children will not complain of vision problems simply because they do not know what 'normal' vision is. If a child is performing poorly at school, an eye test by an optometrist could rule out an underlying visual cause.

How often should one be tested?

Optometrists generally recommend that most people should get their eyes tested every two years. However, in some circumstances, they may recommend more frequent eye tests, especially if one:

- is a child wearing glasses
- has diabetes
- is aged 40 + and has a family history of glaucoma
- is 70+

In addition to evaluating one's vision and a possible prescription for spectacles or contact lenses, the optometrist checks for eye diseases and other problems that could lead to vision loss. Conditions that optometrists will be looking for include:

- Refractive error. This refers to near sightedness, far sightedness and astigmatism. Refractive errors are corrected with spectacles, contact lenses or refractive surgery.
- Amblyopia. This occurs when the eyes are turned or when one eye has a much different prescription than the other. The brain will 'shut off' the image from the turned or blurry eye. Left untreated, amblyopia can stunt the visual development of the affected eye, resulting in permanent vision impairment. Amblyopia is often treated by patching the stronger eye for periods.
- Strabismus. Strabismus is defined as crossed or turned eyes. Your optometrist will check your eyes' alignment to be sure that they are working together. Strabismus causes problems with depth perception and can lead to amblyopia.
- Eye teaming problems. Even if your eyes appear to be properly aligned, it is possible they do not work together efficiently as a team. Such binocular vision problems can cause headaches, eyestrain and other problems that can affect reading and other near vision tasks.
- Focusing problems. These problems can range from incompletely developed focusing skills in children to normal age-related declines in focusing ability (presbyopia) among older adults.
- Eye diseases. Many eye diseases, such as glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy, have no symptoms in their early stages. Your optometrist will check the health of your eyes for signs of early problems. In most cases, early detection and treatment of eye diseases can help reduce your risk of permanent vision loss.
- Other diseases. Optometrists can detect early signs of some conditions and diseases by looking at your eye's blood vessels, retina and so forth. He/she may be able to tell you if you are developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol or other problems. Diabetes for instance can cause small blood vessel leaks or bleeding in the eye, as well as swelling of the macula, which can lead to vision loss. This could be detected during a complete eye exam.

Vision screenings not a substitute

Vision screenings are never a substitute for a complete eye examination with your optometrist. Vision screenings are limited eye tests that help identify people who are at risk of developing vision problems. These are the brief vision tests performed by the school nurse, a paediatrician or the eye test that you take when you apply for a driver's license or have it renewed. Vision screenings may include tests for blur, muscle co-ordination and/or common eye diseases but does not serve as a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination.

A comprehensive eye examination is performed by an optometrist or eye doctor and includes careful testing of all aspects of your vision. Based on the results of your exam, a treatment plan will then be recommended for your individual needs. Only an optometrist or ophthalmologist can provide a comprehensive eye exam. General practitioners and paediatricians are not fully trained to do this and therefore might miss important vision problems that require treatment.

No matter your age, regular eye exams are important for seeing more clearly, learning without difficulty and preserving your vision for life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andre Horn is Assistant Managing Director at Mellins i-Style.

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