



THE COLLEGE OF
OPTOMETRISTS

Common Eye Conditions and Eye Health Related Topics

A guide for media



A-Z



The College of Optometrists is the professional body for optometry. We qualify the profession and deliver guidance and training that ensures optometrists provide the best possible care. Through our public information website *lookafteryoureyes.org* we also raise awareness of the profession and issues in eye health.

Below are a range of conditions and topics on which we can provide comment.

The Role of the Optometrist

Previously known as opticians or ophthalmic opticians, optometrists are trained to examine the eyes to detect defects in vision, signs of injury, ocular diseases or abnormality and problems with general health, such as high blood pressure or diabetes. They make a health assessment, offer clinical advice, prescribe spectacles or contact lenses and refer patients for further treatment, when necessary.

Optometrists study at university for at least three years and must participate in a period of assessed clinical training in practice, before being deemed to have the knowledge and skills needed to be registered. Once registered, they have the opportunity to take further qualifications and develop their interests in specialist areas of practice.

All optometrists practising in the UK must be registered with the General Optical Council, the profession's regulatory body. When choosing an optometrist, look for the letters FCOptom or MCOptom after their name. It means that the optometrist is a fellow or member of the College and adheres to high standards of clinical practice.

The College of Optometrists has produced an animation explaining the role of the optometrist and a poster outlining which professionals a patient is likely to encounter during a visit to an optometric practice. Both are available to download on the College media page.



Common Eye Conditions A-Z

Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

The macula is the area at the back of your eye responsible for central vision, most colour vision and making out fine detail. When the macula is damaged, it becomes harder to recognise faces, or to read or watch television. See lookafteryoureyes.org for causes, symptoms and treatments.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' Through my eyes: AMD video

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: AMD video

The College of Optometrists' Driving with AMD video

Astigmatism

Most people's eyes are round like a football. Astigmatism means that the eye is shaped more like a rugby ball, causing distorted vision. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: astigmatism video

Blepharitis

Blepharitis is the inflammation of the eyelids. It can make eyelids red and puffy, make eyelashes crusty, and make eyes feel itchy or sore. See lookafteryoureyes.org for causes, symptoms and treatments.

Cataracts

Cataracts form when the lens inside the eye becomes cloudy or misty. If vision becomes very impaired, a cataract patient may be referred for surgery to replace the cataract with a clear artificial lens. See lookafteryoureyes.org for causes, symptoms and treatments.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' Through my eyes: cataracts video

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: cataracts video

The College of Optometrists' Driving with cataract video

Colour blindness

Most 'colour blind' people are able to see things as clearly as other people, but they have difficulty distinguishing between some colours. As most colour blind people can see some colours, it is better to describe it as a colour vision deficiency (CVD). Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.



Common Eye Conditions A-Z

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis, or pink eye, is an inflammation of the conjunctiva, the clear membrane that covers the white of the eye. It may cause the eyes to become red, gritty, and uncomfortable. See lookafteryoureyes.org for causes, symptoms and treatments.

Detached retina

Retinal detachment is when the retina, the thin layer at the back of the eye, peels away from the back of the eye. Before the retina detaches, a person might see flashes and/or floaters. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

Dry eye

Dry eye occurs when the eyes don't make enough tears, or tears evaporate too quickly. This can make eyes feel scratchy or irritated, and in severe cases may temporarily make vision blurry. See lookafteryoureyes.org for causes, symptoms and treatments.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: dry eye video

The College of Optometrists' How to: use eye drops video

Flashes and floaters

Floaters are small dark or transparent dots or strands that float in the vitreous gel inside your eye. Flashes can appear as small sparkles usually in the extreme corners of vision. Find out more about causes, symptoms and treatments at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: flashes and floaters video

The College of Optometrists' Through my eyes: flashes and floaters video

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases in which the optic nerve, which connects the eye to the brain, is damaged by the pressure of the fluid inside the eye. See lookafteryoureyes.org for causes, symptoms and treatments.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: glaucoma video

The College of Optometrists' Through my eyes: glaucoma video

The College of Optometrists' Driving with glaucoma video



Common Eye Conditions A-Z

Lazy eye (amblyopia)

Lazy eye may be caused if a young child needs very strong glasses, has one eye that is significantly more short- or long-sighted than the other, or has a squint (see below). This means that sight in the affected eye or eyes does not develop properly. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' What is a lazy eye video

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: amblyopia video

Long-sightedness (hyperopia)

People who are long-sighted find it difficult to see objects that are close to them clearly, such as words on a page or screen, and may need glasses or contact lenses to help. There are varying degrees of long sightedness. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: long-sight video

Presbyopia

Presbyopia is the inability to focus on things that are at normal reading distance, such as text on your mobile phone and print on packaging. It is a natural part of ageing and happens as the lens in the eye loses elasticity. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: presbyopia video

The College of Optometrists' Driving with presbyopia video

Short-sightedness (myopia)

People who are short-sighted have problems seeing things in the distance clearly without glasses or contact lenses, but can see things that are close up. There are varying degrees of short-sightedness. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' All about your eyes: short-sight video

The College of Optometrists' Driving with myopia video



Common Eye Conditions A-Z

Squint (strabismus)

A squint occurs when the eyes don't point in the same direction. This can happen in either eye. If a young child has a squint it is important that they are examined by an optometrist to help prevent lazy eye (see above). Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

Buying glasses online

In 2016, we commissioned research into the issue of buying glasses in store or online. The results found that, when comparing spectacles bought online and those bought and fitted in optometric practices, patients preferred shop bought spectacles.

Buying contact lenses online

Providing a patient has a valid contact lens specification, they can buy contact lenses from wherever they wish, including online. Patients need to ensure they buy lenses from a reputable source, and that they are the same as the ones they were fitted with and which are on their specification. Wherever patients purchase their lenses, it is important that they have regular check-ups. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

Falls

Across the UK, falls are the most common cause of hospitalisation for people aged over 65, and of accidental death in those aged over 75. Undetected and untreated problems with vision play a significant role in older people falling.

Find out more about preventing falls at lookafteryoureyes.org.



Other Topics in Eye Health

Driving and vision

Conditions that may affect a person's ability to drive include strokes and brain tumours, as well as eye conditions such as glaucoma. If an optometrist tells a patient not to drive, they must stop driving immediately, as driving when medically unfit to do so is a criminal offence. Find out about driving and vision, including the DVLA and DVA driving eyesight rules at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists' Driving with glaucoma video

Hay fever

For hay fever sufferers, pollen grains can set off an allergic reaction, as the conjunctiva (the transparent membrane covering the white of the eye) becomes inflamed causing watery, red, itchy eyes. Find out more about hay fever and eye health at lookafteryoureyes.org.

See also:

The College of Optometrists How to: use eye drops video

Smoking

Research suggests that smokers are up to four times more likely to develop conditions including age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and cataracts than non-smokers. Smoking can also make diabetes-related sight problems worse. Find out more at lookafteryoureyes.org.

Screen use

Many people worry that viewing a screen can damage their eyes. There is no evidence to support this. However, some people find that looking at a screen for a long time is tiring, and may find wearing glasses for screen use helpful. Find out more about screen use and eye health on lookafteryoureyes.org.

The role of the optometrist

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You can view the animation on our [YouTube channel](#).



Our Spokespeople



Daniel Hardiman-McCartney

**MBE FCOptom Higher Cert Glauc
Clinical Adviser**

Daniel divides his time between his work at the College, primary care optometry and community glaucoma clinics in East Anglia. He provides trusted advice, guidance and opinion to industry, regulators, governments and NHS systems across the UK. Daniel helped lead the eye care sector's response to the pandemic and has made many national media appearances discussing the importance of good eye health and the vital role of optometry in primary care.

Prior to joining the College, he was the Managing Director of an optometry practice in Cambridge and a visiting clinician at Anglia Ruskin University. He has also worked in the glaucoma team at Addenbrooke's Hospital Trust, Cambridge, and as a diabetic retinopathy screening program grader. He was awarded an MBE for services to optometry in 2022.



Dr Paramdeep Bilkhu

**MCOptom DipTp(IP)
Clinical Adviser**

As well as his work at the College, Paramdeep works in primary care practice and urgent eye care services as a therapeutic optometrist in the West Midlands. He also holds a visiting Research Fellowship at Aston University. He is our independent prescribing lead adviser, clinical management guideline writing team member, leads our myopia management guidance and evidence review and is one of our expert spokespeople.

Paramdeep has worked as a post-doctoral researcher, module co-leader for the Independent Prescribing qualification, and taught on both the undergraduate and postgraduate optometry programmes at Aston University. He is a Fellow of The Higher Education Academy and continues to publish in a range of peer-reviewed scientific journals, with interests in contact lens performance, and ocular surface and eyelid disease management.



Our Spokespeople



Denise Voon

**MCOptom Prof Cert Med Ret
Clinical Adviser**

Denise has spent most of her career in the hospital eye service as a principal optometrist and is currently an optometric adviser to the GOC and domiciliary optometrist in addition to her role at The College. She is particularly interested in medical retina, specifically age-related macular degeneration and producing resources to help support people effected by visual impairment to maintain their independence.

Prior to working for the College, Denise has worked in both multiple and independent practices and, as part of her role in the hospital eye service, Denise has worked in the low vision, specialist contact lens, paediatric, diabetic retinal screening and AMD clinics. She is a trained performance coach and works as a mentor with Women in Vision. In 2019, she won the Macular Society's Awards for Excellence - Optometrist of the Year.

