

Finding an Eye Care Professional

You may have recently had your vision screened and failed the screening, you may have noticed changes in your vision, or you may be at risk for developing glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy. Even if you are not experiencing vision problems, it is important to get regular eye exams. If you are thinking about seeing an eye care professional, but don't know where to begin, this fact sheet can help.

Referrals are often helpful in choosing an eye care professional. Ask trusted friends or contact a hospital or university with a medical school for names and references. You can also call one of the following organizations for a referral to someone in your area. The following are the definitions given by each professional organization with their contact information.

Ophthalmologists

Definition provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology. For more information, contact the AAO at (415) 561-8540 or www.aao.org.

A physician (doctor of medicine or doctor of osteopathy) who specializes in the refractive, medical and surgical care of the eyes and visual system and in the prevention of eye disease and injury. The ophthalmologist has completed four or more years of college premedical education, four or more years of medical school, and four or more years of residency, including at least three years of residency in ophthalmology. The ophthalmologist is a specialist who is qualified by lengthy medical education, training, and experience to diagnose, treat, and manage all eye and visual system problems and is licensed by a state regulatory board to practice medicine and surgery. The ophthalmologist is the medically trained specialist who can deliver total eye care: primary, secondary, and tertiary care services (i.e., vision services, spectacle and contact lens prescriptions, eye examinations, medical eye care, and surgical eye care), diagnose general diseases of the body and treat ocular manifestations of systemic diseases.

Optometrists

Definition provided by the American Optometric Association. For more information, contact the AOA at (314) 991-4100 or www.aoa.org.

Doctors of optometry (optometrists) are independent primary health care providers who specialize in the examination, diagnosis, treatment and management of diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures, as well as the diagnosis of related systemic

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conditions. The optometrist has completed pre-professional education at a college or university, four years at a college of optometry and, in some cases, a residency. Doctors of optometry are specifically trained and state licensed to provide primary eye care services. These services include comprehensive eye health and vision examinations; diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases and vision disorders; the prescribing of glasses, contact lenses, low vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, drugs and medications and the counseling of patients regarding their vision needs as related to their occupation, avocations and lifestyles.

Glaucoma Specialists

The mission of the American Glaucoma Society is to promote excellence in the care of patients with glaucoma and preserve or enhance vision by supporting glaucoma specialists and scientists through the advancement of education and research. For a specialist in your state, visit www.glaucomaweb.org or call (415) 561-8587. If you are 55 or older, you should get a dilated eye exam at least once every two years—more often if you have other health problems. Adults and children who have diabetes should have a dilated eye exam at least once a year.

At a complete eye exam, called a dilated eye exam, the eye doctor widens the pupil of the eye with eye drops to allow a closer look at the inside of the eye. This exam may not be part of an eye exam for a new pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses. Be sure to ask your eye doctor for a dilated eye exam.

Pediatric Ophthalmologists and Adult Strabismus

Physicians that have had advanced specialty training in the areas of children's eye care and adult strabismus can be located by contacting the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus at (415) 561-8505 or at www.aapos.org

When you call to make an appointment

- > Be ready to describe any problems you may have with your vision.
- > The eye exam can affect your vision for up to a few hours. Ask if you will be able to drive home yourself.
- > Ask how much the exam will cost. Do any of your health insurance plans pay for some or all of the cost? How is payment handled?

During the exam

- > Ask about anything you don't understand.
- > Ask what the best time is to call the doctor with questions.
- > Find out when you should return for your next appointment.

