

Driving and vision



Professional Excellence in Eye Health



THE COLLEGE OF
OPTOMETRISTS

Overview

It is important that you can see clearly to be able to drive safely. This leaflet gives you information about vision and driving, including what to do if you feel you can't see well enough to drive, or if your optometrist tells you to stop driving. If you have any questions about your eyes, please speak to your optometrist.



If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes, please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are the eye health specialists in the community.

Driving safely

Having good vision is important to help you to drive safely. Here are our top tips to help you see clearly when driving.

Glasses

- If your optometrist has told you to wear glasses for driving, make sure you wear them, even for short trips!
- If you need to wear glasses for driving, we recommend keeping a spare pair in the car in case something happens to your main pair. This is a legal requirement in some countries outside the UK.
- If you wear contact lenses, it is important to have a pair of glasses in the car in case you need to take your lenses out for any reason.
- Even if you don't need to wear glasses all the time, you will probably find they are helpful when the lighting is poor, such as driving at night. They should also make it easier to see during the daytime as well.
- You may also find that having an anti-reflection coating on the lenses of your glasses helps to reduce the dazzle from oncoming headlights at night.

Tinted lenses

- Do not wear tinted lenses at night or when visibility is poor. Although you may be tempted to wear tinted lenses at night to reduce the brightness of oncoming headlights, the tint will also reduce the brightness of the surroundings. You will find it more difficult to see in the dark than in the light, so making everything darker when there is already limited light will make it even more difficult to see.
- If you find headlights particularly dazzling, ask your optometrist if they can recommend anything to help. A useful tip is to look at the patch of light the headlights make on the road rather than the headlights themselves.

Sunglasses

- Sunshine can dazzle drivers, particularly when the sun is low in the sky. If you wear glasses, you may find it helpful to have a pair of prescription sunglasses in the car, or to wear clip-on sunglasses over your prescription glasses.
- If your glasses have photochromic lenses that go darker in the sunshine, you will probably find that they do not go as dark in the car. This is because the darkening is triggered by the ultraviolet radiation in sunshine, and much of this is absorbed by the windscreen. If your photochromic lenses do not go dark enough for driving, you may find it helpful to wear clip-on sunglasses over them, or wear prescription sunglasses for driving.

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Frames

- When choosing frames for driving, try to avoid those that have thick, heavy sides. This is because they will block your vision to the side (like the blinkers you see horses wearing).
- Frames with thinner sides are better for driving as you will be able to see to the side more easily.
- Your vision can deteriorate slowly without you noticing it, particularly if this happens in one eye only, as you will still see clearly with the other eye.
- We recommend that you know what is normal for you in each eye separately (with glasses if you need them), and visit your optometrist if you notice any changes.
- Even if you do not notice any changes in your vision, we recommend regular eye examinations to make sure your eyes are healthy and you are seeing as clearly and comfortably as possible. For most people, we recommend an eye examination at least every two years.

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The legal requirements to drive a car: vision and visual field

In the UK, there are two standards that you must meet to be able to drive a car on the road:

- how well you can see (your vision); and
- how far you can see around you (your visual field).

Vision

Your vision is measured in two ways – firstly by reading the letters on the optometrist's chart and secondly by reading a numberplate outdoors. You need to be able to do both to drive a car legally, even for short trips. Vision for driving a car is measured with both eyes together, so it doesn't matter if you are blind in one eye as long as the other eye meets the standard.

The standards are:

- 1 The line on the optometrist's letter chart that you must be able to read is the 6/12 line. Your optometrist will be able to tell you if you can read it, and if you need to wear your glasses to do so.
- 2 The second test that you must pass to be able to drive is to read a numberplate (in the style introduced in 2001) from 20 metres away. You can check this yourself at home.

If your optometrist tells you that you need to wear your glasses to meet either of these standards, you must wear them every time you drive, even if it is only a short distance.

Visual field

The visual-field test measures how far up and down and from side to side you can see when you are looking straight ahead. This is normally measured by asking you to look into a machine, focus on a dot or a dim light in the centre of the machine, and click a button when you see a small light flashing around the outside of your vision. During the test, the machine checks whether you are looking away from the centre or pressing the button too often. For driving, it is what you can see with both eyes together that is important, so if you have an eye disease such as glaucoma in one eye only, you will normally be OK to drive as long as there is nothing wrong with the other eye.

Conditions that may affect your visual field and driving include strokes and brain tumours, as well as eye conditions such as diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma (if you have them in both eyes).

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Telling the DVLA

You must tell the DVLA (DVA in Northern Ireland) if:

- 1 you can no longer meet the vision standards for driving, or if a condition or disability has got worse since you got your licence (see [gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions](https://www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions)); or
- 2 you have certain medical conditions, even if you can still meet the vision standards for driving. There is a full up-to-date list on the DVLA website at [gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving](https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving).

Some of the conditions that may affect your eyes, which you need to report, include the following:

- a brain tumour
- a branch retinal vein occlusion in both eyes
- diabetes treated with insulin for more than three months
- diabetic retinopathy in both eyes or in your functioning eye if you only have sight in that eye
- double vision
- glaucoma in both eyes, or in one eye if you have a medical condition in the other eye
- macular degeneration in both eyes
- multiple sclerosis
- optic atrophy
- optic neuritis
- a stroke, if you are still having problems one month after the stroke.

You can report medical conditions to the DVLA online at [gov.uk/report-driving-medical-condition](https://www.gov.uk/report-driving-medical-condition) or by filling in form V1, which you can find on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). If you live in Northern Ireland, visit [nidirect.gov.uk](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk) for information on how to report a medical condition to the DVA.

What will happen when I tell the DVLA or DVA about my medical condition?

The DVLA or DVA will look at your application and decide whether you need to have further tests done to find out if you are fit to drive. They may contact your doctor or consultant or ask you to have extra tests (for example, more visual-field tests), to make sure you are still legally fit to drive. The DVLA or DVA will tell you whether you are able to drive in the meantime.

It is important to remember that telling the DVLA about your medical condition does not necessarily mean that they will take your driving licence away from you.

What will happen if I continue to drive when I should not?

- Driving when you are medically unfit to do so is a criminal offence, and you could face a fine of up to £1,000. You could be putting yourself or others at risk.
- You may be prosecuted if you are involved in an accident.
- You may find that your car insurance will not cover you if you continue to drive when you should not.

Buses and lorries

If you drive a bus or a lorry (group 2 licence), the rules relating to vision are stricter than for driving a car. Your optometrist will be able to tell you about this. There are also more medical conditions that you must report to the DVLA or DVA. For more information, please visit [gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving](https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving) or [nidirect.gov.uk](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk) for Northern Ireland.

For more information, please talk to your local optometrist.

If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes, please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are the eye health specialists on the high street. An eye examination is a vital health check and should be part of everyone's normal health care.

The College of Optometrists is the professional body for optometry. We provide qualifications, guidance and development opportunities for the profession to make sure optometrists provide the best possible care. Our members use MCOptom or FCOptom after their name. Membership of the College shows their commitment to the very highest clinical, ethical and professional standards. Look for the letters MCOptom or FCOptom to see if your optometrist is a member.

Please visit **lookafteryoureyes.org**
for more information.

This information should not replace advice that your optometrist
or another relevant health professional gives you.

Your local optometrist

If you would like this leaflet
in large print, please email
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