

Your Optometrist

The health professional you most need to see

Your optometrist is a primary health care practitioner regulated by government under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. Only a registered optometrist may use the title optometrist and prescribe glasses or contact lenses. Your optometrist is also able to prescribe or sell a range of medicines for treating eye infections and allergies.

Your optometrist will need to examine your eyes before deciding what is wrong and how to treat it. It is necessary to make a diagnosis before commencing treatment of any eye condition. For some eye diseases treatment with a medicine is necessary and sometimes a person with eye disease will be referred for surgical treatment.

REGULAR EYE EXAMS

The NZ Association of Optometrists recommends a regular eye examination every 2 – 3 years for healthy adults; however, contact lens wearers should have the health of their corneas checked annually. After age 65 more frequent exams are necessary to ensure early diagnosis and treatment of sight threatening conditions such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration (ARMD).

If you have noticed changes in your vision, an appointment with your NZAO member optometrist is recommended.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DON'T HAVE AN OPTOMETRIST?

In most places there will be a number of NZAO member optometrists. If you have friends or members of family who wear glasses, (or contact lenses) ask them for a recommendation. A list of optometrists is available on the NZAO website at: www.nzao.co.nz where you can search for an optometrist by location or ask your local doctor for suggestions. Optometrists are also listed in the Yellow Pages phone book. We recommend choosing an optometrist who is a member of the New Zealand Association of Optometrists (NZAO). Members of this professional body are committed to providing the highest standards of clinical care.

HOW ELSE CAN AN OPTOMETRIST HELP ME?

Your optometrist can provide you with advice on choice of sunglasses, information relating to wearing contact lenses for sport, information about visually related learning difficulties and can also make suggestions for eye safety requirements at home and at work.

As a registered health professional, your optometrist can provide help, information, and care for all eye conditions including:

- **SORE EYES, RED EYES OR DRY EYES**

Prompt intervention for most eye problems is available by visiting your optometrist. Optometrists can provide you with the quickest attention and have necessary equipment and specialist skills to examine and diagnose the problem. Often the optometrist can prescribe medications just like a GP or refer you for treatment as appropriate to save you time and discomfort in getting treatment needed to resolve eye problems.

- **FLOATERS**

Floater (or spots) are particles which float inside the eye and cast shadows on the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye (the *Retina*). Usually these are nothing more than a nuisance. However, floaters can result from eye disease or injury and do need assessment by your optometrist.

- **ASTIGMATISM**

Astigmatism is found to varying degrees in most eyes. The result of this condition is that



outlines seem more blurred or shadowed vertically or horizontally (or at an angle in between). This happens because the lens inside the eye or the cornea in front of the eye is toric in shape, where it has unequal curves like a rugby ball rather than spherical like a soccer ball. Astigmatism can occur by itself or with myopia, hyperopia or presbyopia. Prescription lenses will assist astigmatism.

- **MYOPIA**

Myopia means short-sightedness. This is where vision is clear for near objects and blurry for objects at distance. Myopia can be corrected with the help of prescription lenses.



- **HYPEROPIA**

Hyperopia means long-sightedness. This is where the focus power of the eye is too little. The eye has to exert focus effort (called 'accommodation') to keep an object clear. Blurring may occur at all distances, but is more pronounced for near objects, and is sometimes intermittent. The extra effort exerted by the eyes may also cause eyestrain or headaches. Prescription lenses can assist hyperopia.

- **PRESBYOPIA**

Presbyopia is a process that causes the lens of the eye to become less flexible with age. This makes it harder to adjust focus from one distance to another. No matter whether you normally wear spectacles or if you see clearly at distance with both eyes, you will start to have difficulty focussing on small print at a normal reading distance. This begins sometime in your mid-forties. The power of lenses to correct for close work becomes different from that which you may need for long distance. Reading, bifocal or progressive prescription lenses may be needed if you have presbyopia.

- **PHORIAS AND TROPIAS**

People with phorias or tropias will have problems with getting their eyes to work together. With tropia (or squint) the eyes do not work together at all. With phoria a person can co-ordinate both eyes but only with a larger effort than normal. Your optometrist can detect these problems and treatment can be provided in the form of glasses and/or eye exercises.

WHY SHOULD I HAVE MY EYES EXAMINED REGULARLY?

It is important to understand that without a proper diagnosis, there are a number of potentially sight-threatening conditions that would develop unchecked. Without treatment these disorders could progressively destroy your sight and blindness can result.

According to the World Health Organisation, 75% of blindness in the world is preventable.

Some conditions which impair vision can start in early childhood and vision may become blurred very gradually so a child may be unaware he or she does not see as clearly as other people do. Eye coordination issues can also negatively affect a child's visual development and learning. Such problems may go undetected in early years unless the child receives a comprehensive eye examination.

As we age there is an increasing chance of eye problems developing. The sooner eye health and vision problems are discovered, the sooner they can be addressed. Many of the changes caused by eye disease occur slowly, often over a period of years and sometimes without obvious signs or symptoms. Regular check-ups make detection more likely and enable prompt treatment. Early detection results in a better chance of curing or controlling any eye disorder.

If you experience blurred vision, headaches, double vision, sore or red eyes then it is important you let your optometrist know your symptoms.

Your optometrist is a trusted health professional who can provide you with information tailored to your specific needs. If your eye condition can be rectified by corrective lenses your optometrist can prescribe the most appropriate option for you and will recommend glasses or contact lenses only when there is clinical need.