

Eye Care Professions

Optometrists, Ophthalmologists, and Opticians

The eye care professions have become more highly regarded as eye health continues to become more important. Optometrists, Ophthalmologists and Opticians are the main types of eye care professions. Each serves an important role and provides somewhat different services but all have one role in common- to assist all their patients with the best eye care in order to see their best. This includes eye examinations, routine checkups, eyeglass frame selection and fitting, eye surgery, and much more. Each profession requires different educational requirements.

Optometrist

Optometrists, or Doctors of Optometry (O.D.'s), are the main primary vision care professional that most people will go to. Optometrists do everything from diagnosing vision problems and eye diseases, prescribing eyeglasses and contacts, prescribing drugs for the treatment of certain eye diseases, providing treatment before and after surgery, and helping patients maintain healthy eyes.

Optometrists can work in all facets of eye care. They can work in private practices, vision clinics, franchise optical stores, hospitals, as teachers, government positions, and many other venues. Many Optometrists work in a partnership with other Optometrists to provide convenient care for their patients. Some help teach students at Optometry schools and others research new cures for eye conditions and diseases. The field of Optometry has a wide range of available positions.



Becoming an Optometrist requires graduation from an accredited Optometry school and a license in the state of practice. To receive a Doctor of Optometry degree, a student has to attend the minimum 3 years at an accredited college or university before being accepted into a 4 year accredited Optometry school. There are currently only 17 schools in the U.S. and all maintain very competitive admissions standards. Each Optometry school has slightly different requirements for admission. In general these include the basic English, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry. Another requirement is taking the Optometry Admissions Test, or OAT for short. This test is a major factor and can be taken several times to boost scores. Optometry school programs include lectures, labs, and clinical training in visual science, vision rehabilitation, ocular anatomy and physiology, ocular pharmacology and therapeutics, eye movement and vision perception, optics, systemic disease, practice management and more. Those students wanting to get a Masters or a Ph.D. degree may continue taking classes in visual science, physiological optics, neurophysiology, practice management, and others. For students wanting to specialize in a specific field of Optometry, a one year postgraduate clinical residency program is available with fields including primary care optometry, hospital-based optometry, family practice optometry, pediatric optometry, ocular disease, vision therapy, and contact lenses. After successfully completing Optometry school, Optometrists must complete the State Board Examination, of the state they wish to work in, in order to receive a license in that can include therapeutic treatment of certain eye diseases. Licenses must also be renewed every 1 to 3 years depending on the state. All states require continuing education credits to maintain an Optometry license.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual salary of a salaried optometrist was \$86,090 in 2002. The expected growth of employment for Optometrists is expected to grow at a pace as fast as the average rate of other jobs due to increased aging of the baby boomer generation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Greater recognition of the importance of vision care, rising personal incomes, and growth in employee vision care plans will spur employment growth, as well."

Ophthalmologist

When you refer to an "*eye doctor*" you might be thinking about an Optometrist but could be referring to an **Ophthalmologist**. An Ophthalmologist is a Medical Doctor (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.). As a medical doctor, an Ophthalmologist is licensed to practice medicine, perform surgery, and perform all tasks Optometrists do including diagnosing and treating eye diseases, giving eye exams, and writing eyeglasses or contact prescriptions.

Becoming an Ophthalmologist requires graduation from an accredited medical school and a license. Medical school usually takes 4 years to complete after completing 4 years of undergraduate education. After completing medical school, graduates enter internship or residency that may last several years depending on the specialty chosen. An Ophthalmology residency is typically 3 years dedicated to medical and surgical eye care training.

Opticians

There are two types of opticians, dispensing opticians and manufacturing opticians. Both have different job skills but dispensing opticians may sometimes perform some of the same work as manufacturing opticians. Manufacturing opticians are involved in the actual process of making eyeglasses, contacts, and lenses for other purposes. They produce the lenses from scratch to finish according to specifications or prescriptions. Manufacturing opticians learn their trade through apprenticeship. They are hired and taught the trade. They start with simple tasks like measuring lenses and eventually move to the end result of completing the lenses through surfacing, smoothing and beveling. Manufacturing opticians use their hands and also use automated systems. Those that use automated systems take more time learning the use of the machine.

Dispensing opticians are the ones we usually meet when we go in for eye exams or to get a pair of eyeglasses or contacts. They help clients find the best eyeglasses or contacts to fit them and their lifestyles. Opticians take eye measurements to insure proper fitting. They measure the curvature of the eyes to insure proper fitting of contact lenses. Dispensing opticians sometimes do the work of grinding the lenses themselves. They insure that clients know how to properly care for their eyewear. Dispensing opticians can learn their skills through apprenticeships or through classes at a few colleges and universities. Dispensing opticians may also receive a 2 year associate degrees or a license depending on the state. They may also become certified by taking exams from the American Board of Opticians (ABO) and the National Contact Lens Examiners (NCLE). Some states require these certifications for dispensing opticians to fit contacts. Dispensing opticians can open their own retail store or open a franchise store. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment of dispensing opticians is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012 as demand grows for corrective lenses" and a "Median annual earnings of dispensing opticians were \$25,600 in 2002".



A Dispensing Optician deals with patients referred by Optometrists or Ophthalmologists and must have the patience and care to meet the needs of clients.

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