

Driving

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THE COLLEGE OF
OPTOMETRISTS



Overview

It is important that your vision is clear to be able to drive safely. This leaflet gives you information about vision and driving. This includes 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 eye health specialists.

Driving safely

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 some countries outside the UK you must do this by law.
- If you wear contact lenses, it is important to have a pair of glasses in the car. This is in case you need to take your lenses out for any reason.
- Even if you don't need to wear distance glasses all the time, you will probably find they are helpful when the lighting is poor, for example when you are driving at night. They should also make it easier to see during the day as well.
- Having an anti-reflection coating on the lenses of your glasses helps to reduce the glare from oncoming headlights at night.
- 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.
- Do not wear glasses with tinted lenses at night or when visibility is poor. Although you may be tempted to wear these at night to reduce the brightness of oncoming headlights, the tint will also reduce the brightness of the surroundings.



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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. You can also wear clip-on sunglasses over your prescription glasses.
- If your glasses have photochromic lenses that go darker in the sunshine, you will notice they do not go as dark in the car. This is because the windscreen blocks a lot of the sunlight that causes the lenses to darken. If these lenses do not go dark enough for driving, you may find it helpful to wear clip-on sunglasses over them. Or you could wear prescription sunglasses for driving. But it is not legal to drive at any time with category 4 lenses.

Frames

- When choosing glasses for driving, try to avoid frames that have thick, heavy sides 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.



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When to see your optometrist

It is important to have regular eye examinations and check your vision between them, to make sure that your eyes are healthy and your vision is clear. Your vision can deteriorate slowly without you noticing it. This is more likely if your vision gets worse in one eye only, and you can see clearly with the other eye. We recommend that you cover one eye at a time to check how well you can see an object (such as a number plate) with each of your eyes. You should 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

Vision is measured in two ways. Firstly, by reading the letters on the optometrist's chart, and secondly by reading a number plate 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.

In the UK, to be able to drive a car legally on public roads, you must meet the following standards.

1. You must be able to read the '6/12 line' on the optometrist's sight test chart. 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. You must be able to read a number plate 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 the above standards, you must wear them every time you drive, even if it is only a short distance.



You must tell the DVLA or DVA if you can no longer meet the vision standards for driving, or if a condition or disability has got worse since you got your licence.

Visual field

The visual field test measures how far you can see around you while you are looking straight ahead. Your optometrist will normally measure this by asking you to look into a machine, while focusing on a dot or a dim light in the centre. You will need to 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.

Conditions such as strokes and brain tumours may affect your visual field and your ability to drive. Eye conditions such as diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma can also affect your visual field and ability to drive safely, if you have them in both eyes.

If your optometrist tells you that you must not drive, you must stop driving immediately. You must do this even if you drive rarely or only on short journeys.



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

Telling the DVLA and DVA

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), and the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) in Northern Ireland, maintains the list of registered and licensed drivers and vehicles in the UK.

DRIVING

You must tell the DVLA or DVA if:

- 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
- 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 most common conditions that may affect your eyes, which you need to report to the DVLA or DVA, 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 one eye if you only have sight in the other 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 eyesight or physical 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). You can also do this by filling in form V1, which you can find at [gov.uk/government/publications/v1-online-confidential-medical-information](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/v1-online-confidential-medical-information).

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. This may include 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 or DVA 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.



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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.

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

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 eye-health specialists. An eye examination is a vital health check and should be part of everyone's regular health care.

Visit **lookafteryoureyes.org** for clear and helpful information on vision and eye health issues and keeping your eyes healthy.

The College of Optometrists

The College of Optometrists is the professional body for optometry. We provide qualifications, guidance and development opportunities for optometrists so that they can maintain and develop the knowledge and skills they need to deliver the highest standards of care. Membership of the College shows your optometrist's 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 or fellow of the College.

Other letters after your optometrist's name mean they have done further training and gained extra qualifications in diagnosing and managing specific eye conditions. The qualifications are available in different subject areas such as low vision, paediatric eye care, glaucoma and macular degeneration.

YOUR LOCAL OPTOMETRIST



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