Association of Optometrists

Information for patients

Who's who in your optical practice

Optical practices – known as opticians or optometrists – differ in size, as well as in the number and type of staff they have. The practice you visit may be a small independent business with one premises or a store that is part of a national group with a larger team. In every practice that offers sight tests, an optometrist will be present. Every sight test is tailor-made depending on your needs and the methods your optometrist prefers to use. (See the note below.)

Your optometrist

Your optometrist is a highly skilled professional who will thoroughly examine your eyes. During a sight test, your optometrist will test your vision as well as the health of your eyes, prescribing glasses and contact lenses where necessary.

Their qualifications

Optometrists have extensive training for at least four years and must be registered with the General Optical Council (GOC), the governing body. Some optometrists take higher qualifications to allow them to treat common eye conditions or prescribe medicine for conditions affecting the eye and surrounding tissues.

Many optometrists fit contact lenses, dispense glasses and provide specialist services, such as home visits, and provide safety glasses and sports vision eyewear.

Your dispensing optician

Some practices employ dispensing opticians. They are highly trained to provide you with advice on the most suitable frames, lenses and coatings.

They will advise you on the best options for your lifestyle, occupation, hobbies and suitability of your prescription, to make sure your glasses work and fit as well as possible. They will also give you advice on how to best use and care for your glasses.

Their qualifications

Registered dispensing opticians must complete at least three years of academic and practical training and must be registered with the GOC.

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About the AOP

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the voice of the optical profession, representing over 80% of practising optometrists. The AOP elevates the work of its members, safeguards their interests, and champions eye health across the UK. For more information, visit **www.aop.org.uk**

The support team

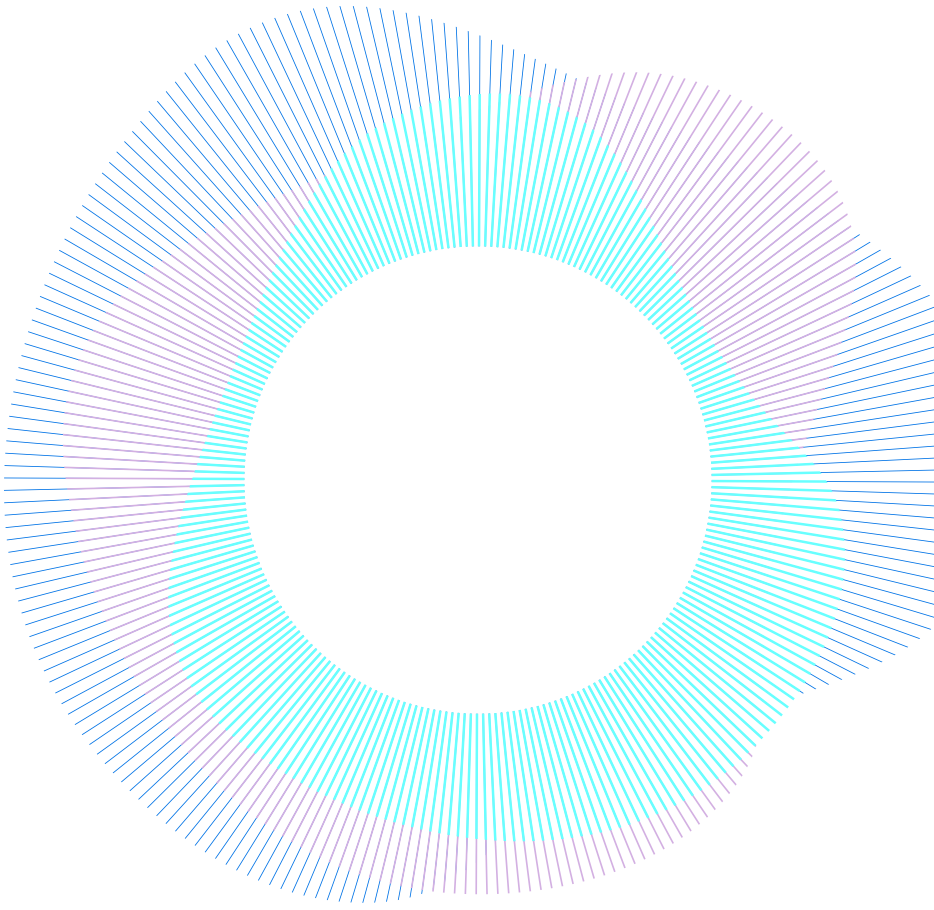
Members of the support team, including receptionist staff, optical assistants and clinical assistants, work under the direction of the practice manager and are often your first point of contact when you visit the practice. Support staff make sure that any necessary paperwork is completed before you see the optometrist. The support team is highly trained and can advise on suitable glasses and lenses, as well as instruct you on how to use your contact lenses safely. They may also have been trained to carry out some clinical tests but the results will be looked at by the optometrist.

Note
If you're in Scotland, a sight test is called an eye examination and will include extra services on top of those carried out elsewhere in the UK.

Other eye-care professionals

After a sight test your optometrist may ask the advice of another healthcare professional.

- You may be referred to another optometrist for further investigation into certain symptoms — this could save you a visit to your hospital eye department.
- Sometimes you may be referred to your GP for health tests, such as a check on your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, or to screen for diabetes.
- If you need treatment for common eye conditions, such as cataracts, you may be referred to a specialist in eye disease called an ophthalmologist.
- For problems relating to the eye muscles or visual development, you may be referred to an orthoptist.



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