
Eye tests

Summary

- Regular eye tests should be an essential part of your healthcare routine.
 - Optometrists and ophthalmologists are healthcare professionals who can test your eyes, and diagnose and treat vision problems.
 - You may need to have your eyes tested more frequently if you have a diagnosed eye condition or another type of medical condition that could affect your eyes.
 - Scheduled screening of babies and children is available, but if you have concerns about your child's vision at any time, speak with your maternal and child health nurse or your doctor.
 - If you wear contact lenses or you have an eye-related condition, you will need special tests to check your eye health.
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Regular eye tests should be an essential part of your healthcare routine. Changes to the health of your eyes can happen gradually and you may not have any obvious signs of disease. Regular eye check-ups may help to detect problems at an early stage, which means you can start treatment as soon as possible to reduce the risk of any permanent damage to your eyes.

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Reasons for eye tests

Everyone should have regular eye tests, although the frequency depends on your age, your health and your risk of developing eye problems. Optometrists generally recommend that you have an eye test every two years.

You may need to have your eyes tested more frequently if you have a medical condition such as:

- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- stroke
- neurological (brain and nerve) conditions.

You may also need a more frequent eye test if you have a diagnosed eye-related condition, such as:

- short-sightedness (myopia or near-sightedness) – difficulty focusing on objects that are in the distance
- long-sightedness (hyperopia) – difficulty focusing on objects that are close
- astigmatism – blurred or distorted vision at all distances
- macular degeneration – loss of vision in the centre of your field of view
- glaucoma – increased pressure in the eye that can cause loss of vision
- retinal detachment – the back layer of the eye (retina) separates from the layer of blood vessels
- cataracts – clouding of the lens of the eye.

It is also a good idea to have your child's eyes tested before they start school. Vision problems that are undetected may interfere with your child's ability to learn and develop. Your optometrist can carry out a comprehensive eye examination to make sure that your child's eyes are healthy.

Healthcare professionals who perform eye tests

Eye tests can be carried out by several types of eye healthcare professionals, including:

- Ophthalmologists (medical specialist doctor) diagnose and treat complex eye conditions and perform eye
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surgery. You will need a referral from your doctor or from an optometrist to see an ophthalmologist.

- Optometrists examine your eyes, test your vision, prescribe and dispense glasses and contact lenses. Some are licensed to prescribe medication to treat common eye diseases.
- Orthoptists dispense glasses and contact lenses, and when working in low vision clinics can assess your vision.

Types of eye tests

During your eye examination, your eye care professional will use a range of tests to determine how well you can see and the health of your eyes.

Regular eye tests

At a routine eye examination, your optometrist or ophthalmologist can:

- ask you about your eyes and vision, and your general health
- measure your ability to see at various distances (visual acuity)
- check how well you see colour
- monitor how your eyes react to light and movement
- measure the pressure inside your eyes
- examine the outer surface of your eyes with a powerful microscope (slit lamp).

Eye tests for children

It is important to have your baby or child's eyes checked to minimise the chance of problems with their vision. The Victorian Government provides free screening that is available:

- in hospital – after the birth of your baby, a doctor or other healthcare professional will shine a light in your baby's eyes
- at three and a-half years of age – the Maternal and Child Health Service offers the Melbourne Initial Screening Test (MIST).

When your child starts primary school, you will also be asked to fill out a questionnaire (the School Entrant Health Questionnaire). You will be asked if your child has had their vision screened (by MIST) or tested by your doctor.

If you have any concerns about your child's vision at any time, speak with your maternal and child health nurse or your doctor. If necessary, your doctor will suggest seeing an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

The optometrist or ophthalmologist will carry out a comprehensive eye examination and look for common problems, such as lazy eye (amblyopia), crossed eyes or turned-out eyes. These conditions need to be treated in childhood to minimise damage and permanent loss of vision in your child.

Contact lens consultation

Some people choose to wear contact lenses instead of glasses. You can ask your optometrist if contact lenses are appropriate for your visual needs. If contact lenses are an option for you, your eye healthcare professional will educate you and perform tests to make sure your eyes remain healthy when you wear contact lenses regularly.

During a contact lens consultation, your optometrist will:

- take your eye measurements and recommend a particular contact lens
- teach you how to insert, remove and care for your contact lenses
- ask you to return for a check-up.

If you wear contact lenses regularly and you do not clean your contact lenses properly, or you wear the contact lenses longer than recommended by the manufacturer, there is the potential for the clear front surface of your eye (cornea) to become damaged or become infected. Everyone who wears contact lenses regularly should go for frequent visits to have the health of their eyes checked.

Specialised eye tests

If you have a diagnosed eye-related condition, such as macular degeneration or glaucoma, or if you have diabetes

or high blood pressure, you may need some specialised eye tests. Your optometrist or ophthalmologist may recommend:

- visual field test or perimetry – a check of your field of vision to detect areas of vision loss
- retinal imaging – a digital image of the back of your eyes
- optical coherence tomography (OCT) – a scan of the innermost area of your eye (retina).

Talk to your optometrist or ophthalmologist for more information.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
- Optometrist
- Ophthalmologist
- Vision Australia Tel. 1399 84 74 66

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