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Buying Eyeglasses and Choosing an Optician

Nearly 160 million Americans of all ages wear eyeglasses or contact lenses to correct their vision. Before you buy your next pair of glasses or contact lenses, keep this information in mind as you visit your local optician.

- Deal with a **licensed optician** who meets state requirements for education and competency. The law requires opticians to display current proof of licensure in plain view of the public. You can check a license status and any disciplinary actions using the online [License Lookup](#) tool, or by contacting the [Board for Hearing Aid Specialists and Opticians](#).
- A licensed optician can discuss with you your selection of eyewear, measure your pupil's distance, and adapt, fit, and adjust eyeglasses to your face. Qualified optician students and apprentices may assist consumers under the direct supervision of a licensed physician, optometrist, or optician.
- If your vision problems continue after you receive new glasses or contact lenses, you should have them rechecked. Contact lenses that are improperly ground or fitted may cause headaches, double vision, or dizziness. Your optician or eye doctor can determine the accuracy of the prescription.

What's the Difference? Optician vs. Optometrist vs. Ophthalmologist

A consumer who needs contact lenses or glasses will visit an optician. An optician fills prescriptions for contact lenses and glasses written by eye doctors (either optometrists or ophthalmologists).

Opticians

Opticians prepare and dispense eyeglasses, spectacles, and contact lenses as identified by the prescription. They use the prescription to reproduce eyewear for a consumer and adapt, fit, and adjust the eyewear to the human face. Only licensed opticians who successfully complete specific educational training and examination may fit consumers with contact lenses.

Optometrists

Optometrists are medical professionals who perform examinations to treat any vision problems and detect signs of disease and abnormal conditions. They may test for glaucoma, color perception, depth, and the ability to focus and coordinate the eyes. Optometrists must hold a Doctor of Optometry (O.D.) degree, pass a state board examination, and be licensed by the Virginia Department of Health Professions.

Ophthalmologists

Ophthalmologists must acquire a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree, a broad knowledge of general medicine, and clinical training. This provides them with enough experience to diagnose and treat all types of eye disorders. If a person requires medical or surgical care for an eye disease or an eye injury, he or she will seek the assistance of an ophthalmologist.

Additional Resources:

- [Consumer Guide on Risk from Decorative Contact Lenses](#)
- Visit the [Department of Health Professions](#) for the Board of Optometry (optometrists) and Board of Medicine (ophthalmologists).
- Homepage for the [Board for Hearing Aid Specialists and Opticians](#).

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