

Hit the road healthy

Eyes need servicing too



Most of us think to check our mirrors, tyres, oil and water before hitting the road, but many of us don't realise the importance our vision plays in safe driving.

Critical decisions made by drivers are predominantly based on sight; good vision is essential to a driver's ability to identify and react to hazards, make accurate judgements and concentrate on the roads. Our vision becomes even more important when driving at night, fatigued, on busy roads, in poor weather conditions and as we age.

One in five drivers has a long-term vision problem that could affect driving performance – most of which are treatable or preventable if found early enough. Often there are no warning signs of developing eye diseases. Knowing how to look after your eyes and having regular eye tests with an optometrist are essential to make sure you become aware of problems early, to avoid irreversible damage, stay safe on the roads and keep driving for longer.

What can I do to stay safe on the roads?

• Avoid eye strain

Using your eyes intently for hours without rest causes eye strain and increased sensitivity to glare. You may be driving home after a hard day's work, or on a weekend drive. This can impact on your alertness and concentration. If you feel your eyes are strained, try moving your head around slowly while still looking straight ahead. This will allow you to change your eye posture without taking your eyes off the road, helping your eyes to relax.

• Rest your eyes

Driver fatigue can seriously affect reaction times, alertness and concentration and is a major cause of road accidents in Australia. It is important to pay attention to how your eyes feel and recognise the symptoms of eye fatigue, such as blurred vision and sore or heavy eyes. Set realistic travel goals and avoid driving at times when you would normally be sleeping or resting. The best way to overcome eye fatigue is to pull over, close your eyes and rest.

• Plan your journey

Before driving long distances, make sure you are well rested. Allow plenty of time for regular rest stops to give your eyes a break. Even if you have perfect day vision it is common to have difficulties seeing at night, including blurriness, double-vision or seeing haloes around lights; ask your optometrist about corrective lenses to help when driving at night.

• Look after your eyes

Accumulated UV exposure can lead to eye disease and vision impairment. Wear sunglasses to reduce glare and squinting while driving and to help protect your eyes from sun damage. Maintain a healthy diet including fruits, vegetables and fish to improve energy levels,

concentration, overall well-being and help prevent eye disease. Even if you think you have good vision, have regular eye examinations with your optometrist to detect and manage or treat underlying vision problems before irreversible damage is done.

• Monitor your eye health

As we get older, our vision inevitably changes and this can start to affect our driving, including our ability to see clearly at night, objects in the distance and out the corners of our eyes. Older Australians are also more at risk of eye disease, such as glaucoma, cataract and macular degeneration. Look for changes in your vision, make sure your glasses- or lens-prescription is up to date, and speak to your optometrist if you have any concerns about your vision and driving.

How your optometrist can help

• Comfort and protection

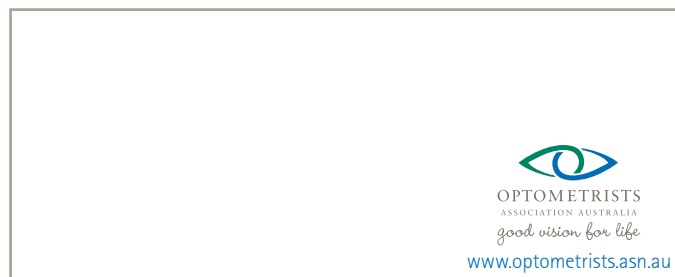
If you experience dry or tired eyes, your optometrist may recommend tear supplements to reduce dryness and improve comfort while driving. To help your vision while driving, prescription glasses or contact lenses can take the stress off your eyes, improve clarity and increase driving confidence. If you are sensitive to glare, anti-reflective lenses may help, both during the day and at night. Your optometrist can also help you choose the best sun protection for your eyes with maximum UV protection and to reduce glare when driving.

• Eye health screening

Your optometrist can provide advice on all areas of your eye health. Standard optometry consultations include tests for eye diseases or conditions which may explain any difficulties you've been having while driving. The earlier a condition is detected, the greater the chance of successful treatment, helping you to retain your vision and keep driving for longer.

• If you notice any changes in your vision, consult an optometrist immediately

Your optometrist can provide a comprehensive eye examination to detect, diagnose and manage or treat eye health problems, and prescribe glasses or contact lenses if they are required.



Eye examinations attract a Medicare rebate, it only takes about 30 minutes and no referral is required. Government-subsidised spectacles are sometimes available.