

What's the difference between Optometrists, Ophthalmologists and Ophthalmic Dispensers/Ophthalmic Technicians—a.k.a. Opticians?



consumer *brief*

WHAT IS AN OPTOMETRIST?

Doctors of optometry (O.D./Optometrists) are the independent primary health care professionals for the eye. Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases, injuries, and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures, as well as identify related systemic conditions affecting the eye.

- Doctors of optometry prescribe medications, low-vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, spectacle lenses, contact lenses, and perform certain surgical procedures.
- Optometrists counsel their patients regarding surgical and nonsurgical options that meet their visual needs related to their occupations, avocations and lifestyle.
- An optometrist has completed pre-professional undergraduate education in a college or university and four years of professional education at a college of optometry, leading to the doctor of optometry (O.D.) degree. Some optometrists complete an optional residency in a specific area of practice.
- Optometrists are eye health care professionals state-licensed to diagnose and treat diseases and disorders of the eye and visual system.

An optometrist will refer you to an ophthalmologist if it is suspected that you may require further treatment such as surgery.

WHAT IS AN OPHTHALMOLOGIST?

Ophthalmologists are medical doctors. The “M.D.” after an ophthalmologist’s name stands for “medical doctor.” Ophthalmologists can perform eye examinations and diagnose eye diseases, eye disorders or other eye conditions. Ophthalmologists can treat all eye problems

and if necessary, perform surgery on your eyes. Ophthalmologists can prescribe eyeglasses, contact lenses and medicine. Ophthalmologists can fill eyeglass and contact lens prescriptions. Ophthalmologists can fit contact lenses, explain how contact lenses are worn and place and remove contact lenses from a consumer’s eye. Ophthalmologists can offer vision therapy.

Ophthalmologists can specialize in specific areas such as the retina or the cornea. Eye conditions or disorders may be a result of medical conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure; therefore, ophthalmologists will work with or consult other physicians concerning your medical history or condition.

WHAT IS AN OPHTHALMIC DISPENSER/TECHNICIAN?

Ophthalmic dispensers/ophthalmic technicians, also known as opticians, make eyeglasses based on a prescription written by a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist. Opticians measure the curve of the eyeglass lens and the distance between your pupils to ensure that your eyeglasses fit properly. An optician may adjust the frames that you select to achieve the best vision for you. An optician will also be able to tell you if the frames that you select are right for your prescription. Opticians can reproduce and replace eyeglass lenses. Opticians can dispense contact lenses and explain how they are worn, but they are not permitted to place or remove a contact lens from a consumer’s eye or change a contact lens prescription.

There are two types of opticians. An ophthalmic dispenser prepares and dispenses both eyeglasses and contact lenses. An ophthalmic dispenser can duplicate or replace existing lenses, spectacles, eyeglasses or contact lenses. An ophthalmic technician fabricates eyeglass lenses and mounts the lenses into eyeglass frames. An ophthalmic technician can also reproduce existing eyeglass lenses.

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An optician may not perform eye examinations, remove foreign particles from the eye, prescribe eyeglasses or contact lenses and may not prescribe medication.

Contact information for all three types of eye care professionals can be found below.

FOR INFORMATION ON OPTOMETRISTS, CONTACT:

New Jersey State Board of Optometrists
P.O. Box 45012
Newark, New Jersey 07101
973-504-6440
www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/opt/Pages/default.aspx



FOR INFORMATION ON OPHTHALMOLOGISTS, CONTACT:

State Board of Medical Examiners
P.O. Box 183
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
609-826-7100
www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/bme/Pages/default.aspx



FOR INFORMATION ON OPHTHALMIC DISPENSERS AND OPHTHALMIC TECHNICIANS (a.k.a. OPTICIANS), CONTACT:

State Board of Examiners of Ophthalmic Dispensers and Ophthalmic Technicians
P.O. Box 45011
Newark, New Jersey 07101
973-504-6435
www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov/oph/Pages/default.aspx

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