

OPHTHALMOLOGIST, OPTOMETRIST AND ORTHOPTIST: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



Macular
Disease
Foundation
AUSTRALIA

What is an eye health professional?

An eye health professional is someone who is qualified to provide care related to your eyes or vision.

What is an ophthalmologist?

An ophthalmologist is a highly trained medical professional, specialising in the diagnosis, management and treatment of eye diseases, injuries, and disorders.

What do they do?

Ophthalmologists are qualified to use a wide range of management and treatment options that may include administering eye injections, performing eye surgery, prescribing medications, and prescribing corrective lenses such as glasses and contact lenses.

They usually see people with:

- partial or complete loss of vision
- eye disease such as macular disease or glaucoma
- eye disease that requires ongoing care and management
- eye or health conditions that may affect their sight (e.g. retinal problems, diabetes and high blood pressure)
- eye injuries, pain or inflammation.

There are different types of eye health professionals. The services and treatments they offer are in line with their level of training.

How much training do they have?

Ophthalmologists in Australia are required to undergo medical training, which includes:

- a university medical degree (five to seven years)
- basic medical training as a newly qualified doctor (minimum of two years)
- ophthalmic specialist training (five years), which involves up to 12,000 hours of training, including surgery.

Where do they work?

Many ophthalmologists work in both public and private hospitals. Some may lead an eye care team that includes optometrists, orthoptists and other health care professionals to ensure that patients receive the most appropriate medical care.

Do I need a referral?

Yes, you will need a referral from your general practitioner or your optometrist to see an ophthalmologist.

What is an optometrist?

Optometrists are primary health care providers who are experts in eye health.

What do they do?

Optometrists are trained to perform comprehensive eye examinations, which includes screening for eye problems, diagnosing eye diseases (including macular disease and diabetic retinopathy), managing visual problems, as well as prescribing and fitting glasses or contact lenses. If required, they are able to refer you to an ophthalmologist for further management or treatment.

How much training do they have?

Optometrists in Australia are required to have a university degree in optometry, which usually takes between five and seven years.

What is an orthoptist?

Orthoptists are eye health professionals who assess and manage eye movement disorders, and associated vision problems.

What do they do?

Orthoptists can test for eye diseases, as well as measure the progression of eye disease (including diabetic retinopathy) using specialised technology. They may also prescribe management and rehabilitation programs for those with vision problems, vision disorders and vision loss.

How much training do they have?

In Australia, orthoptists are required to have a university degree in orthoptics, which usually takes around two to four years.

They are often the first point of contact for people who have eye or vision problems.

Where do they work?

Most optometrists work in private practice. However, they may also work in low vision clinics, hospitals, and government and community organisations.

Do I need a referral?

No, you don't need a referral to see an optometrist.



Where do they work?

Orthoptists work in a number of different settings. These can include private practice, hospitals, low vision and rehabilitation clinics, and community health areas. Orthoptists may work on their own or as part of a multidisciplinary team. They may also work closely with ophthalmologists.

Do I need a referral?

No, you don't need a referral to see an orthoptist.



Need more information?

Learn more about macular disease at
www.mdfoundation.com.au.

How's your macula? Take the quiz at
www.CheckMyMacula.com.au.

You can also access our free, personalised support services and order information kits and Amsler grids by calling our National Helpline on **1800 111 709**.

MDFA has a free newsletter and you can sign up to receive invitations to education sessions and events in your area.

Macular Disease Foundation Australia is committed to reducing the incidence and impact of macular disease, by providing up-to-date information, advice and support.

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