

Optometrist or Ophthalmologist?

Facts to Consider When Choosing an Eye Doctor

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When you think of seeing an Eye Doctor, it is easy to get confused as to the differences between optometrists and ophthalmologists. While they provide some of the same services, there are also several major differences. Once you understand these differences, it's easy to determine when you need to see an optometrist and when a visit to the ophthalmologist is in order.

What is an Optometrist?

An optometrist is a Doctor of Optometry, also known as an O.D. To be an optometrist, one must complete four years of college or undergraduate education followed by four years in a college of optometry. All optometrists must pass a series of rigorous nationally-administered exams to earn their license. Some optometrists will also complete a one-year postgraduate residency to gain more specialized expertise in a particular area.

Optometrists are licensed to do the following:

- Examine and diagnose eye diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts and retinal diseases.
- Diagnose eye problems such as hypertensive retinopathy or diabetic retinopathy that can result from systemic conditions.
- Examine, diagnose and treat visual conditions such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia.
- Prescribe contact lenses and glasses, vision therapy and medications such as antibiotics.
- Perform minor surgical procedures such as the removal of a foreign body.

What is an Ophthalmologist?

An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor (an M.D.) who specializes in eye and vision care. Ophthalmologists are trained to provide the full spectrum of eye care, from prescribing glasses to eye surgery. They may also be involved in research.

After medical school, every ophthalmologist completes a three-year residency in general ophthalmology. During residency, they receive special training in all aspects of eye care, including prevention, diagnosis, medical and surgical treatment of eye conditions and diseases. Some ophthalmologists spend an additional year or two training in a specific area of eye care to become a specialist.

While the routine care provided by ophthalmologists and optometrists is now very similar, there are several major differences. They are:



- Optometrists spend additional time and attention to contact lens fitting and care.
- Optometrists are uniquely positioned to fit and prescribe glasses and care for refractive disorders.
- Ophthalmologists are trained to perform surgery, including Lasik vision correction, removal of cataracts, retinal detachment surgery and more.
- Ophthalmologists have additional specialized training in diagnosing and treating more complex medical eye conditions.
- Ophthalmologists can prescribe a wider range of prescription drugs than optometrists.
- Exams by Ophthalmologists are more likely to be covered by general medical insurance rather than Vision Insurance.

What is an Optician?

Opticians specialize in filling the lens prescriptions that optometrists and ophthalmologists prescribe. They typically receive a one- or two-year degree or certification, which allows them to help you pick out your frames and adjust them to fit comfortably.

Who Should You See?

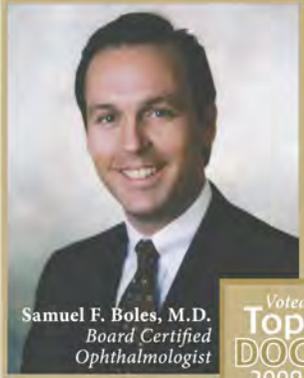
If you are getting an annual eye exam or updating your eyeglasses or contact lens prescription—a comprehensive dilated exam with your optometrist or ophthalmologist is in order. If your local eye doctor finds a more serious eye health concern, they will refer you to an ophthalmologist. As you get older and become at greater risk for eye conditions associated with aging, it is best to see an eye doctor for your routine eye exams. You may also need to see a specialist ophthalmologist for a specific problem in the eye resulting from a disease, trauma, infection, or surgery. 

A Board Certified Ophthalmologist, Dr. Boles is considered one of Maryland's top Surgeons with a subspecialty in cataract and glaucoma disease. Voted by his peers as Top Doc in 2009, Dr. Boles is founder and Medical Director of Anne Arundel Eye Center, a state-of-the-art treatment center offering complete ophthalmic exams as well as diagnostic pre and post-surgical eye care. To learn more, visit www.eyecenter2010.com.

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