

When to check?

The Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends that adults 20-39 years of age have their eyes checked at least once every 2 to 3 years, annually for those under 20 years of age. Certain health conditions carry a higher risk of developing vision problems. These include high blood pressure, diabetes and a family history of eye disease including glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration or retinal detachment. If any of these apply to you, talk to your optometrist about having your eyes checked more frequently. You may also want to consider having your eyes checked more frequently if you work in an area where eye injury may happen, or if you are a person of African or Hispanic descent, as certain ethnic backgrounds are at greater risk of developing eye problems. However, should you notice any of the following changes, it is recommended that you get your eyes checked as soon as you can:

- **Vision changes:** unable to differentiate colour or dullness, sudden spots, flashes of light, lightning streaks, blurriness, distortions, haloes around lights or double vision
- **Vision field changes:** shadows, tunnel vision, minimal or absent peripheral (side) vision, complete or partial blindness in one or both eyes
- **Physical eye changes:** such as crossed eyes, eyes that turn in, out, up or down, pain, signs of infection (redness, swelling, discharge, etc.)

Note that your optometrist may also refer you to an ophthalmologist (specialist) if necessary.

What kind of screening is this?

A general eye examination involves an optometrist or ophthalmologist checking all parts of the eye, for any changes, abnormalities or infections. An eye exam may contain the following elements, but your examination may vary depending on your age and needs:

Health History:

Your eye care doctor may ask you about any existing medical conditions, talk to you about medications that you may be taking, assess your family history of visual problems and discuss any concerns that you have.

Visual Acuity Test:

You will be asked to read letters from a chart, covering one eye at a time, to test how well each eye can read small details separately and together.

Ocular motility:

This test includes an evaluation of your eye reflexes and movements.

Ophthalmoscopy:

Indirect or direct ophthalmoscopes may be used for this examination of the back of your eye, including your retina and blood vessels. This is done by shining a bright light in your eye, while the rest of the room remains dark.

Retinoscopy (Refractive Error Test):

During this test, your optometrist will use a retinoscope and a variety of special lenses to test how well your eye accommodates light and produces clear images

both near and far. This will give your doctor a good picture of the strength of your eyesight, or how well you see things.

Slit lamp examination:

A special microscope is used to check the inside of your eye from front to back for early indications of disease and signs of infection.

Tonometry test (pressure test): Painless puffs of air are directed at each eye to measure the fluid pressure; this is an important test in detecting glaucoma (progressive damage to the optic nerve that can cause blindness). Your optometrist will also examine your eye lids and the area surrounding your eyes for abnormalities and signs of infection. Your peripheral vision will be tested to measure how well you can see objects and images that are not directly in front of you. Additionally, your eye muscles, nerves that support the eyes, pupils, retina and macula will also be looked at separately to make sure that they are strong and functioning properly. These are all of the most common parts of an eye examination. Your eye doctor may modify these tests to fit your specific eye health needs.

Why?

According to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), 75% of vision loss is preventable. Going for a routine eye exam can uncover the early signs of vision problems and point to their causes and possibly correct them. Having your eyes checked regularly may also identify early signs of related diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. It's also important to practice [vision safety](#) precautions to avoid injuries. According to the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, "vision impairment prevents healthy and independent aging: social dependence increases, risk of falls and mortality rate doubles, the risk of depression triples and the risk of hip-fractures quadruples" (Breslin, 2007).

What to tell your doctor:

1. Medical history, including any personal or family history of eye diseases or health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol or stroke.
2. Any recent vision problems: pain, redness, blurriness, sudden spots, flashes or streaks of light, wavy or watery vision, distortions, haloes around lights, double vision, etc.
3. Any allergies and list medications you are taking: over-the-counter medications, prescription drugs, supplements, vitamins and natural health products.
4. Indicate if you wear protective eye gear, have a high risk job or work in a hazardous environment.