

Tips for your eye care appointment

Make the most of your appointment with your optometrist.



These tips can help patients, families, and caregivers get the most from their optometry appointments.

This resource was developed by a team of patients, optometrists, and family doctors to support anyone receiving eye care in Alberta.

Before your appointment

Use these tips to prepare for your appointment.

- List your questions and concerns.** Include your symptoms, medications (including dosage), and what each medication treats.
- List any of your other health conditions.** Sharing this information with your optometrist can help them understand your overall health and provide care that aligns with your needs.
- Mention any online information you've found about your eye concerns.** Your optometrist can clarify what's accurate.
- Reflect on your priorities.** Think about what matters most to you, such as managing a condition or staying proactive with regular checkups.
- Know your family's eye health history.** Note any conditions like glaucoma or macular degeneration to help assess your risks.
- Write down your family doctor's name and clinic.** This helps your optometrist share updates and coordinate care.
- If needed, send information before your appointment.** Call the clinic to ask how to share your records or details before your visit.
- Bring a support person if needed.** A family member or friend can help with note-taking, translation, communication, or mobility.
- Ask for more information or resources.** If you'd like to learn more about your concerns, medications, or treatment options, ask your optometrist for reliable resources.
- Check your coverage.** Review available Alberta Health coverage and clinic fees here: <https://optometrists.ab.ca/learn-about-eye-health/vision-coverage>
If you have private insurance, confirm your benefits and renewal dates in advance.
If you are unsure about fees or coverage, call the clinic before your appointment.



As an optometrist, my job is to determine the cause of your discomfort, find solutions to your current eye health issues, and inform you on potential future issues.

Patients know their symptoms best and your health care team should always take your symptoms seriously. **Preparing a list of questions and issues you've noticed, along with any research you've done on your own, will help direct our discussion and treatment decisions in a more personal way.**

– Dr. Aaron Yau, Optometrist in Airdrie, AB



During your appointment

Use these tips during your appointment with your optometrist.

- Start the conversation.** Bring up your questions, concerns, symptoms, and any medications that you are taking.
- Ask about your treatment options.** Find out the advantages and disadvantages, possible side effects, frequency, expected results, alternatives, reliable information sources, and any related costs or available insurance coverage.
- Ask your optometrist to share your report with your family doctor.** Your optometrist can share your report with your family doctor and/or other health care providers to help keep them informed and involved in your care.
- Write or record any instructions provided.** This can help you remember important details.

After your appointment

Use these tips after your appointment with your optometrist.

- Schedule recommended appointments and fill prescriptions.** To support your care, try to complete these tasks as soon as possible.
- Let your family doctor know about your recent appointment, treatments, or surgeries.** This can help them understand your health and support your care.
- Continue to track your symptoms.** Include any changes or patterns you notice.
- If you notice any changes before your next eye exam, contact your optometrist.** This may include changes in your vision, redness, pain, or unusual discharge. Medical visits are partially covered by the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan regardless of your age.



Did you know? Certain eye diseases can progress without any noticeable symptoms. Even if your vision seems fine, **your eye health could be changing.** Routine eye exams help detect issues before they become serious.

Some of this information has been adapted from Health Quality Alberta's *Tips for talking to your health care team and Questions to ask about treatment options.*
<https://www.hqa.ca/info>



When should I see my optometrist?

See your optometrist for the following reasons:

Routine	Urgent or Emergency (seek care immediately or go to nearest urgent care or emergency room)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual eye exam• Cataract assessment or monitoring• Diabetic health exam• Drugs that can affect the eyes – monitoring• Dry/watery eyes• Glaucoma assessment or monitoring• Macular degeneration assessment or monitoring• Pediatric eye alignment assessment or monitoring• Pediatric eye exams• Post operative care• Post stroke monitoring• Prescriptions for glasses, contact lenses, and medications• Vision testing• Other concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chemical burns (pain, redness, or other symptoms)• Eye injury• Eyelid infection/inflammation• Eye pain with redness or other symptoms• Eye strain with other symptoms• Facial shingles• Flashing lights• Floaters (spots in your vision)• Foreign objects in eye• Headaches with other symptoms• Red eye(s)• Styes• Sudden blurry vision• Sudden changes to vision• Sudden droopy eye lid• Sudden loss of vision• Other concerns

If you are unsure whether you need to see an optometrist, you can call an optometrist clinic for guidance.



Did you know? You do not need a referral to see an optometrist.



Urgent care options (non life or vision threatening)

Call your optometrist clinic for an urgent appointment. Clinics generally reserve a few appointments per day for urgent appointments. Find an optometrist at <https://optometrists.ab.ca/find-an-optometrist>

After-hours care options:

- For advice and general health information (24/7), call Health Link at 8-1-1
- Go to the nearest urgent care facility. For a list of urgent care facilities, visit: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/service.aspx?id=1003853>

Emergency care options (life or vision threatening)

Call your optometrist clinic for an emergency appointment. Clinics generally reserve a few appointments per day for emergencies. Find an optometrist at <https://optometrists.ab.ca/find-an-optometrist>

Other options:

- Go to the nearest emergency room. For a list of emergency rooms, visit: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/service.aspx?id=6915>
- If you need an ambulance, call 9-1-1
- For advice and general health information (24/7), call Health Link at 8-1-1

Location	Emergency facilities for eye care
Calgary	Rockyview General Hospital
Edmonton	Royal Alexandra Hospital

A larger font size is used on this page to accommodate patients experiencing urgent or emergency symptoms.



Role of Optometrists

Optometrists play a key role in supporting your vision, eye health, and overall well-being.

They work closely with ophthalmologists as part of a continuum of care. If a referral to an ophthalmologist is needed, your optometrist can provide it and continue to support your care as needed.

Provider	Optometrist	Ophthalmologist
Their role in your health	Optometrists are Doctors of Optometry and provide primary eye care to patients. This includes the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases.	Ophthalmologists are medical doctors specialized in treating eye diseases and performing complex eye surgeries.
When to see them	When you need a regular eye exam and/or if you're dealing with new, ongoing, or recurring eye issues. Your optometrist can examine, diagnose, and/or treat chronic, recurrent, and/or early to moderate stage eye diseases.	If you need eye surgery or treatment for a complex eye disease, you may need care from an ophthalmologist.

Find an optometrist

To find an optometrist near you, visit: <https://optometrists.ab.ca/find-an-optometrist>

Eye health information

To learn more about eye health for you and your family, visit: <https://optometrists.ab.ca/learn-about-eye-health/when-and-whats-examined>

Available coverage and clinic fees

Optometrists inform patients prior to their appointment.

Group	Recommended eye care	Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) as of July 2025
Children 18 and under 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Babies should have their first exam between 6-9 monthsToddlers and preschoolers should have at least one eye exam between the ages of 2 and 5Kindergarteners should have an eye exam when they begin kindergartenSchool children should have an annual eye exam	<p>For the latest information about coverage, please check https://www.alberta.ca/ahcip-what-is-covered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Alberta Health partial coverage is available toward one eye exam per year, renewing every July 1.Additional exams and/or treatments may be partially covered based on medical needs.Patients can ask their optometrist for information about coverage and potential costs for specific issues.The Kindergarten Eye See...Eye Learn™ Program provides kindergarten students in Alberta with an eye exam from an optometrist (based on the available coverage) and if needed, a free pair of eyeglasses. Please visit: https://www.optometrists.ab.ca/eye-see-eye-learn/im-a-parent
Adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adults should have an eye exam at least every two years, or as recommended by their optometrist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alberta Health does not cover eye exams for adults, however many Albertans have insurance coverage through their employer or their own medical plan.Patients can inquire at the optometrist's clinic about the cost of the eye exam and direct billing to their insurance company.
Seniors 65+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Seniors should have an annual eye exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alberta Health partial coverage is available towards eye exams for seniors 65+, renewing every July 1.Limited coverage for optical assistance (eyeglasses) is available through Alberta Health: https://www.alberta.ca/dental-optical-assistance-seniorsAdditional exams and/or treatments may be covered based on medical needs, such as glaucoma, diabetes or cataract follow-up or monitoring.Patients can ask their optometrist for information about coverage and potential costs for specific issues.
Urgent eye care, eye infections, and medically necessary treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">As listed on page 1 (not including annual eye exam)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Patients do not need a referral.These appointments are partially covered.If patients are unsure whether their specific issue would be covered, they can ask their optometrist before the appointment.

Optometrists can charge for insured services that the optometrist deems to exceed the AHCIP benefit. Albertans are responsible for the additional costs incurred at the time of the treatment. Optometrists are required to discuss the fees with their patients before providing the service.

Feedback about these tips? Please email us at alberta.association@optometrists.ab.ca