

## Optometrist Overview

Overview - Preparation - Day in the Life - Earnings -  
Employment - Career Path Forecast - Professional Organizations

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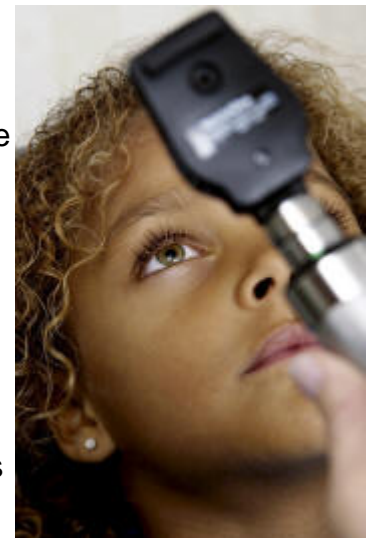
### Overview

Optometrists, also known as doctors of optometry, or ODs, provide most primary vision care. They examine people's eyes to diagnose vision problems and eye diseases, and they test patients' visual acuity, depth and color perception, and ability to focus and coordinate the eyes. Optometrists prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses and provide vision therapy and low-vision rehabilitation. Optometrists analyze test results and develop a treatment plan.



They administer drugs to patients to aid in the diagnosis of vision problems and prescribe drugs to treat some eye diseases. Optometrists often provide preoperative and postoperative care to cataract patients, as well as to patients who have had laser vision correction or other eye surgery. They also diagnose conditions caused by systemic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, referring patients to other health practitioners as needed.

Most optometrists are in general practice. Some specialize in work with the elderly, children, or partially sighted persons who need specialized visual devices. Others develop and implement ways to protect workers' eyes from on-the-job strain or injury. Some specialize in contact lenses, sports vision, or vision therapy. A few teach optometry, perform research, or consult.



Optometrists should not be confused with ophthalmologists or dispensing opticians. Ophthalmologists are physicians who perform eye surgery, as well as diagnose and treat eye diseases and injuries. Like optometrists, they also examine eyes and prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses. Dispensing opticians fit and adjust eyeglasses and, in some States, may fit contact lenses according to prescriptions written by ophthalmologists or optometrists.

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## Preparation

All States and the District of Columbia require that optometrists be licensed. Applicants for a license must have a Doctor of Optometry degree from an accredited optometry school and must pass both a written National Board examination and a National, regional, or State clinical board examination. The written and clinical examinations of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry usually are taken during the student's academic career. Many States also require applicants to pass an examination on relevant State laws. Licenses are renewed every 1 to 3 years and, in all States, continuing education credits are needed for renewal.

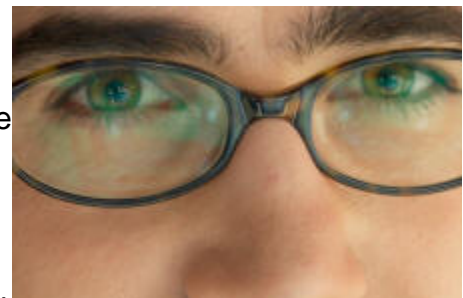


The Doctor of Optometry degree requires the completion of a 4-year program at an accredited optometry school, preceded by at least 3 years of preoptometric study at an accredited college or university. Most optometry students hold a bachelor's or higher degree. In the U.S. schools and colleges of optometry programs are accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association.

Admission to optometry school is competitive. Requirements for admission to schools of optometry include courses in English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. A few schools also require or recommend courses in psychology, history, sociology, speech, or business. Because a strong background in science is important, many applicants to optometry school major in a science such as biology or chemistry, while other applicants major in another subject and take many science courses offering laboratory experience. Applicants must take the Optometry Admissions Test, which measures academic ability and scientific comprehension. Admission to optometry school is competitive. As a result, most applicants take the test after their sophomore or junior year, allowing them an opportunity to take the test again and raise their score. A few applicants are accepted to optometry school after 3 years of college and complete their bachelor's degree while attending optometry school.



Optometry programs include classroom and laboratory study of health and visual sciences, as well as clinical training in the diagnosis and treatment of eye disorders. Courses in pharmacology, optics, vision science, biochemistry, and systemic disease are included.



Business ability, self-discipline, and the ability to deal tactfully with patients are important for success. The work of optometrists requires attention to detail and manual dexterity.

### "Optometrist Overview"

Prepared as part of the Sloan Career Cornerstone Center ([www.careercornerstone.org](http://www.careercornerstone.org))

► **Advanced Degrees**

Optometrists wishing to teach or conduct research may study for a master's or Ph.D. degree in visual science, physiological optics, neurophysiology, public health, health administration, health information and communication, or health education. One-year postgraduate clinical residency programs are available for optometrists who wish to obtain advanced clinical competence. Specialty areas for residency programs include family practice optometry, pediatric optometry, geriatric optometry, vision therapy and rehabilitation, low-vision rehabilitation, cornea and contact lenses, refractive and ocular surgery, primary eye care optometry, and ocular disease.



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► **Accredited Programs**

the United States, Doctor of Optometry degrees are accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association. The following table provides links to currently accredited pharmacy programs.

<p><b>ALABAMA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>CALIFORNIA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Southern California College of Optometry</a></li> <li>► <a href="#">University of California, Berkeley School of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>FLORIDA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>INDIANA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Indiana University, School of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>ILLINOIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Illinois College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>MASSACHUSETTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">New England College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>MICHIGAN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Ferris State University, Michigan College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>MISSOURI</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">University of Missouri, St. Louis College of Optometry</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>NEW YORK</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">State University of New York State College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>OHIO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">The Ohio State University College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>OKLAHOMA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>OREGON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Pacific University College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>PENNSYLVANIA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Pennsylvania College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>PUERTO RICO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>TENNESSEE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">Southern College of Optometry</a></li> </ul> <p><b>TEXAS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>► <a href="#">University of Houston College of Optometry</a></li> </ul>
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## Day in the Life

Optometrists work in places -- usually their own offices -- that are clean, well lit, and comfortable. Most full-time optometrists work about 40 hours a week. Many work weekends and evenings to suit the needs of patients. Emergency calls, once uncommon, have increased with the passage of therapeutic-drug laws expanding optometrists' ability to prescribe medications.

Most optometrists are private practitioners who also handle the business aspects of running an office, such as developing a patient base, hiring employees, keeping paper and electronic records, and ordering equipment and supplies. Optometrists who operate franchise optical stores also may have some of these duties.



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## Earnings

Median annual earnings of salaried optometrists were \$91,040 in the most recent surveys. The middle 50 percent earned between \$66,530 and \$118,490. Median annual earnings of salaried optometrists in offices of optometrists were \$86,760. Salaried optometrists tend to earn more initially than do optometrists who set up their own practices. In the long run, however, those in private practice usually earn more.

According to the American Optometric Association, median net annual income for all optometrists, including the self-employed, was \$105,000 in 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$84,000 and \$150,000. Self-employed optometrists, including those working in partnerships, must provide their own benefits. Optometrists employed by others typically enjoy paid vacation, sick leave, and pension contributions.

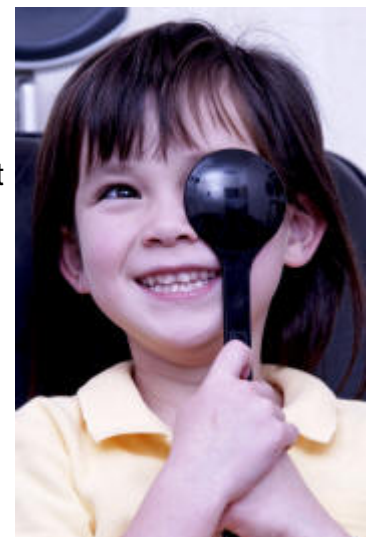


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## Employment

Optometrists hold about 33,000 jobs in the United States. Salaried jobs for optometrists were primarily in offices of optometrists; offices of physicians, including ophthalmologists; and health and personal care stores, including optical goods stores. A few salaried jobs for optometrists were in hospitals, the Federal Government, or outpatient care centers including health maintenance organizations.

Nearly 25 percent of optometrists are self-employed. According to a recent survey by the American Optometric Association most self-employed optometrists worked in private practice or in partnership with other health care professionals. A small number worked for optical chains or franchises or as independent contractors.



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## Career Path Forecast

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of optometrists is expected to grow as fast as average for all occupations through 2016, in response to the vision care needs of a growing and aging population. Greater recognition of the importance of vision care, along with growth in employee vision care plans, will also spur job growth.

Employment of optometrists is projected to grow 11 percent between 2006 and 2016. A growing population that recognizes the importance of good eye care will increase demand for optometrists. Also, an increasing number of health insurance plans that include vision care, should generate more job growth.

As the population ages, there will likely be more visits to optometrists and ophthalmologists because of the onset of vision problems that occur at older ages, such as cataracts and glaucoma. In addition, increased incidences of diabetes and hypertension in the general population as well as in the elderly will generate greater demand for optometric services as these diseases often affect eyesight.

Employment of optometrists would grow more rapidly if not for productivity gains expected to allow each optometrist to see more patients. These expected gains stem from greater use of optometric assistants and other support personnel, who can reduce the amount of time optometrists need with each patient.

The increasing popularity of laser surgery to correct some vision problems may reduce some of the demand for optometrists as patients often do not require eyeglasses afterward. But optometrists still will be needed to provide preoperative and postoperative care for laser surgery patients.

Job opportunities for optometrists should be very good over the next decade. Demand is expected to be much higher, and because there are only a few accredited optometry programs, the number of students who can get a degree in optometry is limited. In addition to growth, the need to replace optometrists who retire or leave the occupation for other reasons will create more employment opportunities.



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## Professional Organizations

Professional organizations and associations provide a wide range of resources for planning and navigating a career in nursing. These groups can play a key role in your development and keep you abreast of what is happening in your industry. Associations promote the interests of their members and provide a network of contacts that can help you find jobs and move your career forward. They can offer a variety of services including job referral services, continuing education courses, insurance, travel benefits, periodicals, and meeting and conference opportunities. A broader list of professional associations is also available at [www.careercornerstone.org](http://www.careercornerstone.org).



- ▶ **American Optometric Association ([www.aoanet.org](http://www.aoanet.org))**
- ▶ **American Optometric Student Association ([www.theaosa.org](http://www.theaosa.org))**
- ▶ **Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry ([www.aoanet.org](http://www.aoanet.org))**