



## How Are Ophthalmologists, Optometrists, and Opticians Different?

**Ophthalmologists** (Eye M.D.s) are different from optometrists and opticians in their training and in what they can diagnose and treat.

As a medical doctor, an ophthalmologist is licensed to practice medicine and surgery. He or she diagnoses and treats all eye diseases, performs eye surgery, and prescribes and fits glasses and contact lenses.

Ophthalmologists complete

- four years of college;
- four years of medical school;
- one year of internship; and
- at least three years of residency (hospital-based training) in the diagnosis and medical and surgical treatment of disorders of the eye.

While all ophthalmologists specialize in eye problems and can treat all conditions, some decide to concentrate in a specific area of medical or surgical eye care. These ophthalmologists are called subspecialists. They usually complete a fellowship, which requires one or two more years of training in the chosen area. Some subspecialists focus on the treatment of a disease, such as glaucoma. Others subspecialize in a particular part of the eye, such as the retina. Pediatric ophthalmologists subspecialize in treating eye disease in children.

An **optometrist** is a doctor of optometry, licensed to practice optometry. Optometrists determine the need for glasses and contact lenses, prescribe optical correction, and screen for abnormalities of the eye. They attend two to four years of college and four years of optometry school.

In some states, optometrists can prescribe certain kinds of drugs to help diagnose and treat some eye conditions. Optometrists generally do not perform surgery.

An **optician** is licensed by the state to make optical aids. He or she fits, adjusts, and dispenses eyeglasses, contact lenses, and other optical devices according to the prescription of a licensed ophthalmologist or optometrist. Training for opticians varies from a preceptorship to two years of optician school.