



# Sight tests at home



**A sight test can be a vital health check for anyone. However, it may be overlooked as part of our health routine particularly for older people or those with disabilities. For these people, who may have other health conditions, eyecare may seem less of a priority, or it may be that older people or those with disabilities are unable to access services or manage their eyecare independently. Some people assume that poor vision is inevitable in older age and that nothing can be done to improve it.**

... arranging a **home visit**, or, for those who are more able, by arranging **transport** to take them **to a local practice**.

Care home staff, visiting health professionals, families and home care services can all play an important role in helping to ensure that eyecare is not neglected in this vulnerable group of people by arranging a home visit, or, for those who are more able, by arranging transport to take them to a local practice.

The sight test will be tailored to the needs of the individual person and does not rely on good communication; people who have, for instance, had a stroke, have learning disabilities or for whom English is not their first language can still be provided with an effective sight test. People can ask their local NHS for help if they need interpretation services.

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## Benefits of a sight test

**Good vision can have a positive impact on a person's independence and general well-being, and can also help to prevent falls.**

Age is a risk factor for developing glaucoma. This eye condition usually causes no symptoms in the early stages but if untreated may lead to significant loss of vision. Glaucoma may be picked up during a routine sight test.

A sight test may also detect changes in the eye due to cataract, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy, as well as other health problems such as raised blood pressure.

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## What is a domiciliary sight test?

**A domiciliary sight test is a sight test which an optometrist or ophthalmic medical practitioner (OMP) carries out in the person's normal place of residence or a day centre. Much of the essential equipment used for a sight test in a high street practice has a portable equivalent.**

Optometrists or OMPs who provide domiciliary services are experienced in examining people who have disabilities, or who have limited communication or concentration, and can adapt the sight test accordingly.

Much of the **essential equipment used for a sight test** in a high street practice has a **portable equivalent**.

## NHS entitlement

**Anyone who is eligible for an NHS sight test but can not get to a high street practice unaccompanied because of a mental or physical disability, is entitled to a domiciliary sight test funded by the NHS.**

Sight tests are provided by the NHS in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for various groups of people including those who are aged 60 and over. In Scotland NHS eye examinations are funded by NHS Scotland for everyone.

A full list of eligible groups is available on the NHS Choices website **[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)** for England and Wales. For Scotland visit **[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)** and Business Services Organisation in Northern Ireland **[www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1778.htm](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1778.htm)**

- Sight tests are normally recommended at least every two years but may be more frequent depending upon an individual's circumstances. The optometrist will give advice on how frequently the individual should have their sight tested.
- People can ask for an NHS-funded sight test more frequently if they have symptoms or concerns that indicate that a sight test is clinically necessary.

NHS-funded sight tests are also provided for those in receipt of some means-tested benefits such as Income Support and Pension Credit guarantee credit.

Those who are on low income, such as Pension Credit guarantee credit may also qualify for help towards the cost of spectacles. Leaflet HC11 'Help with Health Costs', available from GP surgeries, dentists and optical practices, provides further information.

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## Booking an appointment for a domiciliary sight test

**The person or, if appropriate, a relative or main carer must request a domiciliary sight test. The person must be given free choice about which provider they use.**

If people have difficulty in finding a domiciliary provider, they should either contact their local NHS organisation or call:

- NHS Direct on **0845 46 47** if they live in England or Wales<sup>1</sup> or
- NHS Helpline on **0800 22 44 88** if they live in Scotland or
- NHS for Northern Ireland on **0800 587 8982**  
**[www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1779.htm](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1779.htm)**

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## Before the appointment

### Notification

#### in England and Wales

Before providing a domiciliary sight test the optometrist or OMP has to give notice to the NHS, giving them the person's name, address and date of birth, the date of their last sight test and the date and time of the proposed sight test. The notice must be at least 48 hours for one or two people at the same place, and three weeks for three people or more. This may cause a short delay when booking a sight test.

**In Scotland** at least one month's notification is required when three or more people are to be visited at the same address.

**In Northern Ireland** notification must be at least 48 hours before the sight test except for urgent situations, when no notification is required.

<sup>1</sup> From April 2013 the health service in England will change and NHS Direct will no longer exist. The College's patient website **[www.lookafteryoureyes.org](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org)** will give details of the new contacts as soon as these are known.

## Background information

**It is extremely helpful, to give the following information to the optometrist or OMP:**

- The date of the person's last sight test (whether NHS or private) and ideally the person's previous prescription.
- The person's spectacle wearing habits (any spectacles should be available at the sight test).
- Information about whether the person is having any problems with their eyes or their vision.
- The person's own eye history (i.e. whether they have ever been to hospital because of their eyes) and that of their close family.
- The person's medical history and that of their close family.
- Any medication that the person is taking.



## Where the sight test takes place

**Where possible, the sight test should take place in a room which has good lighting, and blinds or curtains which allow the room to be darkened when needed.**

Ideally, there should be three metres of space in front of the person's chair or bed and enough space on either side so that the optometrist or OMP can get to both sides of the person.

No part of the sight test is painful, although some parts may be uncomfortable.

Access to a plug socket will be needed.

If the layout of the room needs to be changed, this can sometimes cause the person distress; they should be reassured that the changes will only be while the sight test is carried out. If this is likely to happen, it can be helpful if this is explained in advance.

No part of the sight test is painful, although some parts may be uncomfortable, and eye drops that 'sting' for a few moments may need to be used. Some of the tests (such as covering one eye, or being very close to the person) may make them uneasy. If this is likely to happen, it may help for family, staff or carers to practise this with the person in advance by covering their eye (with a hand or a piece of card, for example). This will mean that the person is not taken by surprise during the sight test. Some people may also be less anxious during the sight test if they have practised having light from a small torch shone in their eyes, and discussed, in advance, with staff and carers what will happen.

The person might wish to have a relative or carer present during the sight test and this is generally good practice.

## After the sight test

**At the end of a sight test, the optometrist or OMP will give the person a copy of their prescription for spectacles (or a statement that no spectacles are required) together with any feedback and advice.**

With the person's permission, this can also be relayed to their family or carer. It could include a general report on the health of the person's eyes and their vision, advice on lighting, use of magnifiers and explanations of any problems. The optometrist or OMP will advise whether new spectacles are required, and why. If further medical checks are required, they will discuss this and explain the procedure for referring the person to their doctor or the hospital. The optometrist or OMP will advise when they recommend the person has their next routine sight test.

This information, together with the person's history information, should be kept with the person's records.

If eye drops have been prescribed, they should be stored with the person's other medicines unless they require refrigeration. Attention must be paid to any expiry and discard-by dates, which indicate how long the drops should be kept once opened.



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## Supply of spectacles

**People do not have to buy new spectacles following a sight test, and they do not have to buy them from the optometrist or OMP who provided the sight test.**

People can buy spectacles from any supplier.

People can buy spectacles from any supplier. The cost of spectacles varies. If the person is on a low income they may qualify for some help from the NHS towards the cost of spectacles. The optometrist or OMP will be able to advise on this.

If the person orders spectacles following a home sight test, they have the right to cancel the order within seven days.

The supplier of the spectacles will arrange for them to be delivered and fitted and will provide a follow-up service for any future adjustments or repairs.

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## Signing the forms

If the sight test is to be NHS-funded, a sight test application form (GOS6) – supplied by the optometrist or OMP – must be completed at the time of the sight test. Whoever signs the form (which may be the person having the sight test or someone signing on their behalf) must check all the information on the form is accurate, because they may be held responsible if there are any errors regarding eligibility for NHS services.

If the person is eligible for NHS help towards the cost of spectacles, whoever signs the form must make sure that the information they are confirming is correct.

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## Day to day care

### **Some simple steps can help everyone, and particularly vulnerable people, with their daily eyecare:**

- Mark spectacles with the person's name to avoid mix-ups; many domiciliary optical providers do this as a free service.
- If the person attends a day centre, it may be possible to keep one pair of spectacles permanently at the centre. However, a spare pair of spectacles cannot normally be funded through the NHS voucher system.
- Try, where possible, to check that the person is wearing the correct spectacles for particular tasks.
- Clean spectacles regularly.
- Look out for signs that the person is having problems with their vision which makes it hard to do daily tasks. Guidance can be found on **[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)**<sup>1</sup> and **[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**
- Notice any changes to the physical appearance of the person's eyes.
- Keep the person's eyelids clean to avoid infections and discomfort. If there are any signs of eye infection etc. please contact the person's optometrist or GP.

Family and carers can play an important role in the provision of appropriate eyecare, which can make an enormous difference to the well-being, independence and quality of life of older people, and others who require care.

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## Further information

For more information about domiciliary eyecare services please contact **domiciliary@fodo.com**

Helpful websites:

**[www.lookafteryoureyes.org](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org)**

**[www.lookupinfo.org](http://www.lookupinfo.org)**

**[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**





[www.pocklington-trust.org.uk](http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

[www.lookafteryoureyes.org](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org)

[www.opticalconfederation.org.uk](http://www.opticalconfederation.org.uk)

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