



Irish College of
Ophthalmologists

Eye Doctors of Ireland, protecting your vision

MEDIA FACT SHEET

What is the Irish College of Ophthalmologists?

The Irish College of Ophthalmologists is the professional body for eye doctors in Ireland. The College is responsible for setting and maintaining the highest standards in ophthalmic training for doctors specialising in the field and for continuing medical education and professional development for those in the practice. The ICO is recognised by the Medical Council as the only post graduate training body for ophthalmology.

The central goal of the ICO is to maintain standards of excellence for the restoration of vision and the preservation of sight through the education of its members, trainees and the public.

The College runs a yearly calendar of educational events including an Annual Scientific Conference, attended by leading international speakers and also supports and promotes research in the ophthalmic field including the awarding of annual bursaries.

The ICO is focused on its strong leadership role, providing accurate medical information to the public and policy guidance to the government. The ICO is dedicated to working with all relevant parties on the most appropriate model of care for Ireland based on excellence in medical care and patient safety.

What is an Ophthalmologist?

An ophthalmologist, or eye doctor, is a medically trained doctor who has undertaken further specialist training and study in matters relating to the human eye. An eye doctor specialises in the treatment and management of diseases of the eye and other medical conditions that have an effect on the eye or visual system. In the Republic of Ireland there are two types of Eye Specialists; Medical Eye doctors who undergo 11 years of clinical medical training, and Eye Surgeons who undergo on average 14 years of clinical medical training. Eye doctors work in hospitals and in the community in the public and private sector.

What is the difference between an ophthalmologist (eye doctor), orthoptist and optometrist?

They are all professionally trained people who treat those with ophthalmic problems.

Ophthalmologists (eye doctors) are medically trained doctors who have undertaken further specialist training and study in matters relating to the human eye. They examine, diagnose and treat diseases and injuries of the eye.

Orthoptists diagnose and treat defects of vision and abnormalities of eye movement. They are usually part of a hospital care team looking after people with eye problems especially those related to binocular vision, amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (squint).

Optometrists (Ophthalmic Opticians) are trained to examine eyes, give advice on visual problems and prescribe and fit glasses and contact lenses. One of their most important functions is to detect ocular abnormalities and if a disease or condition of the eye is suspected they will advise you to attend a medical practitioner.

When should someone see an Eye Doctor?

Adults should see an eye doctor **as soon as possible** if they notice any of the following:

- Changes in vision such as sudden spots, flashes of light, lightning streaks or jagged lines of light, wavy or watery vision, blurry faces, distortions or wavy lines, haloes around lights, double vision
- Changes in the field of vision such as shadows, curtain-like loss of vision, black spots or blurriness in central or peripheral (side) vision
- Changes in colour vision
- Sudden loss of vision such as decreased or no vision in one or both eyes
- Physical changes to the eye such as crossed eyes, eyes that turn in, out, up or down, pain, signs of infection (Red eye, painful eye, swelling around eye, etc.)

If you have any of the above symptoms, see an eye doctor. Researchers believe that up to 75% of blindness and vision loss can be avoided once the condition is diagnosed and treated early.

If someone is feeling healthy how often should they have their eyes checked?

Healthy adults who do not notice anything obviously wrong with their eyes should still have their eyes tested **every two years**.

If you have a family history of eye problems or have diabetes, you should have an eye examination every year and speak to your GP or optician about seeing an Eye Doctor or visit www.eyedoctors.ie to find an eye doctor in your area.

Are some people more at risk from eye disease than others?

Anyone can develop sight problems, but some people have a higher risk of eye disease and should have their eyes examined regularly.

These include:

- People who have diabetes are at risk of losing vision through a condition called diabetic retinopathy, in which the retina becomes damaged.
- Those with a tendency toward high intraocular pressure
- Those with a family history of glaucoma, cataract, macular degeneration, or retinal detachment
- Those with a previous eye injury;
- People taking certain medications
- Those with very poor eyesight.

How to make an appointment with an eye doctor

For an appointment to see any medical specialist working in the HSE, including eye doctors, you need to get a referral from your General Practitioner (GP). A GP has knowledge of the specialists in his/her area and can ensure that any important information relating to your medical history is passed to the eye doctor.

Can I make an appointment directly with an eye doctor?

While it is advisable to seek a referral from your GP many eye doctors working in the community will give you an appointment directly - you can find contact details for eye doctors at this page <http://www.eyedoctors.ie/visitors/eyedoctors-database.asp>

How to check if an eye doctor (ophthalmologist) is registered with the Irish Medical Council

Via the Council www.medicalcouncil.ie

The Irish Medical Council www.medicalcouncil.ie maintain the medical register, which lists all doctors (including eye doctors) who are qualified to practice in the Ireland. The Medical Council protects the interests of the public when dealing with registered medical practitioners. The Medical Council also holds the specialist register which gives details of a doctors' specialist training. The Irish College of Ophthalmologists advises the Medical Council on the suitability of eye doctors for inclusion on the Ophthalmology specialist division of the register.

For further media information or to arrange to speak to an eye doctor for expert medical comment, please contact:

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