

Optometrist

Professional Activities

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 pre-operative 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.

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.

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.

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.

Optometrists work in places—usually their own offices—that are clean, well lighted, 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.

Educational Requirements

The Doctor of Optometry degree requires completion of a 4-year program at an accredited optometry school preceded by at least 3 years of pre-optometric study at an accredited college or university (most optometry students hold a bachelor's or higher degree).

Requirements for admission to schools of optometry include courses in English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. A few schools require or recommend courses in psychology, history, sociology, speech, or business. Applicants must take the Optometry Admissions Test, which measures academic ability and scientific comprehension. Most applicants take the test after their sophomore or junior year. Competition for admission is strong.

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.

ODs wishing to teach or do 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 ODs who wish to specialize in family practice optometry, pediatric optometry, geriatric optometry, vision therapy, contact lenses, hospital-based optometry, primary care optometry, or ocular disease.

Academic Programs

[Illinois College of Optometry](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

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, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. 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 was previously thought to have an adverse effect on the demand for optometrists as patients often do not require eyeglasses afterward. However, optometrists will still be needed to provide preoperative and postoperative care for laser surgery patients, therefore laser eye surgery will likely have little to no impact on the employment of optometrists.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High%
United States	Hourly	\$29.61	\$59.76	\$92.50
	Annual	\$61,590	\$124,300	\$192,390
Illinois	Hourly	\$24.68	\$55.89	\$78.28
	Annual	\$51,330	\$116,260	\$162,820

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2021	2031		
Optometrists	41,400	45,400	10%	1,700
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Optometrists	1,660	1,720	+4%	60

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (opted.org)

American Optometric Association, Educational Services (aoa.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/optometrists.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/29-1041.00>)

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