
Vision - Key Facts for Drivers

Good eyesight is essential for safe driving and poor vision can impair your driving performance. You are responsible for ensuring that your vision meets the specified minimum requirements every time that you drive. If you notice or suspect any change in your vision, do not delay, visit your optometrist or optician.

If advised to wear spectacles or contact lenses for driving (or distance vision) you should wear them at all times when driving.

The current UK standard for Group 1 (car and motorcycle) drivers is the ability to read in good light (with the aid of spectacles or contact lenses, if worn) a number plate at:

- 20m for vehicles displaying the new-style number plate
- 20.5m for vehicles displaying the old-style number plate

Different standards apply to Group 2 (lorry and bus) drivers, who require a documented assessment of vision to renew their licence.

It is a criminal offence to drive with eyesight below the legal standard.

10 Key Facts for Drivers

1. Your vision can change at any age and at any stage in your driving career. Have your eyes tested regularly, at least every two years, unless advised otherwise by your optometrist.
2. Commonly reported problems include not seeing road or street signs, and difficulties driving in twilight or night conditions, which might indicate an underlying eye condition or disease.
3. Some eye conditions do not demonstrate symptoms in the early stages so regular sight testing is important to ensure early detection and access to treatment.
4. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) estimates that, if detected early, half of sight loss can be avoided.
5. You must notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) of any medical condition which may affect safe driving.
6. Loss of vision in one eye, loss of peripheral vision (visual field) and double vision can severely affect your ability to drive, even though you may pass the number plate test.
7. Eye diseases and conditions that affect vision can occur at any age, although they are more common in people aged over 60, and other groups such as those with a family history of glaucoma and those with diabetes.
8. Drivers aged 70 years and over must renew their licence every 3 years and declare that they still meet the medical standards to drive including the vision standard.
9. Visit your optometrist or optician for more information on vision and driving, including the best type of lenses, frames, sunglasses and lens coatings for driving.
10. A clean windscreen, on the inside and outside, makes it easier to see what is ahead.

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Condition	Incidence	Common symptoms	Effect on driving ability
Short-sight (Myopia)	Incidence varies by age or ethnicity – myopia usually develops in childhood or adolescence	Blurred distance vision	Uncorrected myopia can cause problems reading road signs or street names Twilight or night driving can be difficult
Long-sight (Hypermetropia)	Incidence varies by age Spectacles may be needed full-time or just for near vision	Uncorrected long-sightedness can cause blurred distance vision and headaches	Uncorrected long sight can cause difficulty reading street names or signs, or eyes can feel tired
Cataract	2.5 million people aged 60 and over ¹	Cloudy, hazy vision Glare from bright lights Change in colour perception	Difficulties regularly reported with night driving or in poor weather or bright sunlight
Glaucoma	2% of population over 40, rising to 10% over 75 ²	Often without any symptoms in the early stages May have haloes about lights Acute glaucoma attack can be severely painful	Glare or difficulties driving at night Loss of peripheral vision can cause difficulties maintaining lane position
Macular Degeneration	1.49 million in UK ² (mostly aged 65 and over)	Problems seeing detail, vision blurred in centre, or distorted vision	Problems with night driving or seeing road signs or recovery from bright light
Diabetes Related Eye Disease	748,000 have diabetic retinopathy ³	Variable or blurred vision Can be without symptoms	Problems often reported with night driving
There are a range of other eye conditions that can affect driving performance. For further information please ask your optometrist/eye care professional.			

¹ 2.5 million people in the UK are estimated to have sight impairing cataract. Source: National Research Strategy for Ophthalmology (RCOphth 2002)

² Source: Future Sight Loss UK (2) Epivision (2009)

³ Source: Future Sight Loss UK (2) Epivision (2009)