

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.

The current vision test for Group 1 (car and motorcycle) drivers in the UK 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

If you are told to wear spectacles or contact lenses for driving you must wear them at all times when driving.

Group 2 (lorry and bus) drivers need to have slightly better vision than car drivers and need a medical assessment of vision to renew their licence.

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

Key Facts for Drivers

1. You must notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) of any medical condition which may affect safe driving, including changes in vision. 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 people with diabetes or a family history of glaucoma.
2. Commonly reported eye sight problems when driving include difficulty seeing road or street signs or driving in twilight or night conditions.
3. Some eye conditions do not cause symptoms in the early stages. It is therefore important to have regular eye examinations – every two years unless your optometrist tells you otherwise – to detect them early.
4. Loss of vision in one eye, loss of peripheral vision (visual field) or double vision can severely affect your ability to drive, even though you may pass the number plate test.
5. All drivers aged 70 years and over must renew their licence every three years and declare that they still meet the medical standards to drive, including the minimum eyesight requirement.
6. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) estimates that over 30% of sight loss may be avoided if eye conditions and diseases are detected early. A further 50% of sight loss can be easily corrected with spectacles or contact lenses.

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.

Condition	Prevalence	Common symptoms	Effect on driving ability
Short-sight (myopia)	Prevalence varies by age and 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)	Prevalence varies by age Spectacles may be needed full-time or just for near vision	In older people, 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
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 or seeing hazards
Macular degeneration	2.1 million in UK ^{3 4} (mostly aged 65 and over)	Problems seeing detail, vision blurred in centre, or distorted vision	Problems with night driving or seeing road signs
Diabetes related eye disease	748,000 have diabetic retinopathy ⁴	Variable or blurred vision Can be without symptoms	Problems often reported with night driving
<p>There are a range of other eye conditions that can affect driving performance. For further information please ask your optometrist/eye care professional.</p>			

¹ RCOphth (2002) National Research Strategy for Ophthalmology

² NICE (2009) Glaucoma: diagnosis and management of chronic open angle glaucoma and ocular hypertension

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

⁴ RNIB (2014) Eye health data summary report