

Optometrist

Test eyes, catch disease early, prescribe glasses, contacts and medication. A four-year doctorate, no surgical residency, and clinics in every town.

TYPICAL PAY

\$136,570

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$75k to \$202k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Private practices, optical retail chains, eye clinics, veterans hospi...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and calculus. Physics matters more here than in most health careers because optics is the whole foundation.
- 2 Undergraduate study** 3 to 4 years
At least three years of college covering biology, chemistry, physics, math and English, and in practice almost everyone finishes a bachelor's degree first.
- 3 Optometry admission test** A few months of study
A standardized exam covering the sciences, reading and physics. Taken in your third or fourth year of college.
- 4 Doctor of optometry** 4 years
Four years at one of the 25 schools and colleges of optometry in the United States. Classroom science first, then clinic rotations with real patients.
- 5 National board examinations and state license** Across the final two years
Three parts covering basic science, patient management and live clinical skills, then apply to your state board for a license.

Pros and cons

- + A doctorate and a six-figure salary in seven or eight years
- + No residency required, unlike every medical specialty
- + Weekday hours, very little call and almost no emergencies
- \$180,000 to \$250,000 of student loans is normal
- Retail chain work can feel like a production line
- Scope of practice fights with ophthalmology are constant and political

Optional boosts

Ocular disease. Specialty contact lenses. Pediatric optometry and vision therapy. Low vision rehabilitation.

Good to know

There are only 25 optometry schools

The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry counts 25 schools and colleges of optometry in the United States, plus two in Canada. Several states have none at all, which is why so many studen...

An eye exam finds more than eye problems

The back of the eye is the only place in the body where blood vessels and nerve tissue can be seen directly without cutting anything. Optometrists regularly spot the first signs of diabetes, high blood pre...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Optometrists (29-1041.00)
National Board of Examiners in Optometry
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
American Optometric Association

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/optometrist>



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