

Optometrist, Ophthalmologist and Orthoptist: What Is the Difference?

The variety of professional titles within eye care can be genuinely confusing, and understanding the differences helps clarify who to see for a particular concern. An optometrist is typically the first point of contact for most people, trained to carry out eye examinations, prescribe glasses and contact lenses, and identify signs of eye disease requiring further referral. An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who has specialised in eye care, qualified to diagnose and treat eye diseases, prescribe medication and perform surgery. Many ophthalmologists further subspecialise, focusing specifically on areas like retinal disease, glaucoma or paediatric eye conditions, which is often where a retinal specialist referral leads to. An orthoptist specialises in diagnosing and managing problems with eye movement, alignment and binocular vision, often **OCT retinal imaging** working closely with both optometrists and ophthalmologists, particularly in cases involving squints, double vision or certain childhood vision conditions. Understanding these distinctions can help make sense of referral letters and clinic structures, and reassures patients that each professional they encounter along a referral pathway brings a specific area of expertise to their care.