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Ophthalmologists

An Ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who specializes in the medical care of the eyes and visual system as well as in the prevention and treatment of eye disease and injury. They are physicians who are trained to provide total eye care including:

- Vision services
- Contact lenses,
- Eye examinations,
- Screenings for various diseases of the eye, and
- Medical and surgical eye care.

An Ophthalmologist can diagnose general diseases of the body and treat systemic diseases associated with the visual system (i.e.: hypertension and diabetes).

Most Ophthalmologists practice a mixture of medicine and surgery, ranging from eyeglass prescriptions and standard medical treatment to skilled surgery. The average general Ophthalmologist incorporates standard treatment and surgical procedures into their practice. Cataract removal is the most commonly performed ophthalmological surgery. Other surgeries include treatment for glaucoma, eye muscle imbalances, eyelid obstruction, and traumatic injury.

Training and Credentials

An Ophthalmologist has completed four or more years of premedical education at a college or university, four or more years of medical school, one year of internship and three or more years of specialized medical and surgical training and experience in eye care. In Virginia, Ophthalmologists are licensed by the [Department of Health Professions-Board of Medicine](#). Although most Ophthalmologists practice general ophthalmology, many are trained in a subspecialty area, such as pediatrics, plastic surgery, cornea and external disease, and glaucoma. With the advancement of laser technology, there are many new procedures available to treat many eye issues.

Preparing for the Visit

An important part of the patient-physician relationship is good communication. The more involved you are with your health care decision, the better. Here are some recommendations from the [National Eye Institute](#) for getting the most out of a visit with your doctor:

- Ask as many questions as you need to until you understand your doctor's response.
- Take notes, or ask a friend or family member to take notes for you. Or, bring a tape-recorder to help you remember later what was said during your visit.
- Ask your doctor to write down his or her instructions to you.
- Ask your doctor for literature about your condition.
- If you still have difficulty understanding your doctor's responses, ask where you can go for more information. Other members of your health care team, such as nurses and pharmacists, can be good sources of information. Talk to them, too.

Cost & Coverage

Medicare will pay for some medical and surgical treatments, but the cost of an eye care examination and eyewear is often not covered. Medicare will help you pay for one pair of eyeglasses after cataract surgery with an intraocular lens.

Consumer Tip

Although cataracts can occur at any age, it is after age 60 that most cataracts damage vision. The [National Eye Institute](#) recommends that anyone over the age of 60 have an eye examination every two years.

Many Ophthalmologists specialize in one or two areas of expertise. Ask your physician how many procedures he or she has done, how often, and with what success. If concerned about whether a particular surgery is necessary, or whether you have chosen the right physician, feel free to receive a second opinion prior to any surgical intervention.

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