

Gordon Turner Optometrists



Lighting the way

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Domestic lighting is an often-overlooked part of the home, but as winter approaches, effective internal illumination is vitally important for the good of our vision, particularly for the millions of people with less than optimal levels of sight. Effective indoor lighting eases the strain on our eyes, reduces the risk of accidents (especially on staircases) and improves our sense of security, making this subject well worth researching and investing in.

Different apartments will have varying lighting requirements, depending on a range of factors from the size of the windows through to what the room is used for. However, some things are almost universally beneficial - individual dimmers make lighting easier to control, for instance, and programmable timers

ensure consistent levels of brightness every day. Spotlights or lamps can aid reading when strategically placed behind chairs, and concealed pelmet illumination and extractor hood spots are very useful while preparing food in kitchens. Uplighters disperse light softly around walls (as opposed to comparatively harsh ceiling bulbs) and cleverly placed pools of brightness can be a decorative feature in their own right.

Full spectrum lighting is well worth considering around the house, especially for people who spend large amounts of time in one room, such as home workers. Not only do these powerful white lights provide a level of brightness comparable to natural daylight, they also alleviate the dreaded Seasonal Affective Disorder - often attributed to serotonin levels in the human body falling as the levels of sunshine and natural daylight diminish. Perfect illumination should be glare-free, bright and evenly dispersed, and SAD lamps (as they're often referred to) comfortably meet all these criteria. Conversely, fluorescent strips cast a sickly yellow light - an unbecoming colour that, along with noise and flickering issues, has led to their fall from grace.

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With so many different spectacle frame designs on the market, making the right choice can be a daunting decision. From rimless rectangles to ostentatious ovals, glasses have never been more fashionable, and a well-chosen pair can provide the finishing style statement for anybody's face.



Your optician can offer expert advice about which particular frames suit your features, from skin tone to facial shape, and whether they will be comfortable. Alongside this, you need to be happy with how a certain pair of glasses makes you look, and there's a huge choice of designs to suit all budgets. A lot depends on your size and shape of face; dainty features suit small, curved frames, whereas a more masculine jawline can be set off nicely against a pair of chunky rectangular glasses. Also consider the practical aspects of your new frames – do they fit on the bridge of your nose? If they're not comfortably tucked behind your ears, would you want to wear them every day? Remember that frames are fitted in-store, and further adjustments are available even after you've purchased them.

Many patients only need glasses for specific scenarios, such as computer use or driving, and your optician can ensure they are fully suitable – selecting lenses with good peripheral vision, for instance. If making a style statement is uppermost in your priorities, pay attention to what people are wearing on TV and in magazines – it's surprising how quickly you'll start to spot trends, from discreet designs to statement spectacles. If your eyes are one of your best features, look for glasses that draw attention to them, and choose frames that highlight your eyebrows and cheekbones, rather than obscuring them.

Choosing the right glasses isn't a decision to be rushed, because the eyes play a major role in communication and glasses are possibly the most instantly noticeable accessory you wear. That's why you can take as much time as you like in-store to study your appearance in the mirrors. Bring someone along with you, since other people can see you from every angle, to judge whether or not certain frames look good. You can even take pictures of yourself and review how you look.

Finally, remember that some frames will work better with different types of lenses, and your dispensing optician is ideally qualified to advise you here. The strength of your prescription might make some combinations inadvisable – thick lenses on rimless frames, for instance – unless you slim your lenses down. Similarly, if one of your eyes is much weaker than the other, you should probably go for a thicker frame so nobody can see the difference in lens depths, although the current fashion for strong, noticeable glasses means you can be as bold as you like.





Glaucoma is one of this country's leading eye-related conditions, yet it is also one of the hardest to identify without the help of an optometrist. This degenerative condition affects two per cent of the UK population over the age of 40, and is markedly more common in older people, occurring in roughly ten per cent of over-80s. It can cause blindness if left untreated for too long, but what is glaucoma, and how can you prevent it from affecting your sight?

Glaucoma results from damage to the optic nerve caused either by raised pressure in the eye or weakness of the nerve itself. High pressure occurs when the liquid produced behind the iris cannot be drained properly and affects the optic nerve, which is the part of the eye that relays retinal observations through to the brain. This condition usually develops gradually and often affects both eyes, though sometimes at different rates.

There are two different varieties of glaucoma, and early symptoms of the closed angle form can include headaches, eye pain or difficulty in focusing on close work, while other telltale signs can be coloured rings appearing around lights, or problems adjusting to the dark. However, the more common variety of the disease is open angle glaucoma, which has no symptoms. Because of its insidious nature, it is typically detected during eye tests, particularly with advanced testing equipment, where changes in the eyes can be identified compared to previous records.

Regular check-ups for glaucoma are vitally important, particularly for older people or anyone with a family history of the disease. Diabetics, smokers and myopia sufferers are at higher risk, as are people from Afro-Caribbean and Asian backgrounds. Simple inspections by a qualified optometrist can often identify the early stages of glaucoma by measuring eye pressure, studying the field of view of each eye, or examining the optic disc at the back of the eye. Although the disease isn't fully understood, it is believed that certain foods and chemicals can be useful in mitigating the development of glaucoma, including vitamin E, dark chocolate, green tea and omega 3.



If you are diagnosed with glaucoma, there's no need to panic - early diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of the condition can keep it in check. Eye drops can reduce pressure, while tablets and surgery may also be suitable, and despite having to notify DVLA if glaucoma has been diagnosed, sufferers can continue to drive if their vision remains strong enough. Although it isn't possible to recover any sight already lost when glaucoma is diagnosed, your optometrist will be able to offer expert advice about the best way to manage the condition on an ongoing basis, helping to preserve your vision.



As the clocks go back and we head inexorably into another winter, it's worth giving some thought to the specific challenges of driving at night. After the glorious summer months of barely needing to turn on the headlights, piloting a vehicle through pitch-blackness can be something of a culture shock, but the various complications of darkness can be significantly diminished by a little forethought and advanced planning.



Driving with imperfect vision is never recommended, but it's especially critical to have pin-sharp eyesight at night, since darkness makes it much harder to identify road signs, lane markings and potential hazards. Low light diminishes our colour recognition, depth perception and peripheral vision levels, and our ability to see in the dark worsens with age. A sight test in autumn is therefore recommended for anyone who regularly drives at night, particularly the over-40s, and spectacle lenses should be fitted with anti-reflective coatings to reduce glare from lights.

Automotive common sense is called for as the nights draw in and the road departments begin gritting the highways. Clean your windscreen regularly, replace worn wiper blades and ensure your washer fluid reservoir is topped up with a mixture of water and screen cleaning fluid, since the roads get very dirty in winter and detritus thrown onto the screen can cause visibility problems. In a similar vein, never drive off until your demister has cleared any moisture from inside the windscreen, or before any ice has been removed – the human eye simply doesn't function well enough in low light to compensate for obscured windows. Demisters can also irritate or dry your eyes; your optician can advise on counteracting this discomfort.

Most importantly, make sure your car's external lights are all fully functioning and free from dirt. Check them once a fortnight at the front and rear of the vehicle, since blown or obscured bulbs not only attract the attention of Her Majesty's constabulary but also pose a potential danger to you and other motorists. Even in areas with street lamps, headlights and taillights are essential for seeing (and being seen) at night, while unlit roads require extra care, since a variety of hazards could be lurking outside the range of your headlight beams. Remember to only use full beam when no cars are in front of you, to avoid blinding oncoming motorists, and never look at the headlights of an approaching vehicle, since retinal burn can occur.

Finally, at the risk of stating the obvious, always remember to turn on your lights once the sun has set if they don't come on automatically. If we're honest, most of us will have forgotten this small but crucial step at least once in our driving careers...

