

EYING THE FUTURE

Optician, Optometrist, Ophthalmologist — What's the Difference?

- **Opticians are not eye doctors.** They are technicians trained to design and fit eyeglasses and contact lenses, based on the prescriptions issued by other eye practitioners, like ophthalmologists and optometrists. Each state has its own requirements for licensure, but in most places, the main prerequisite is completing either a two-year apprenticeship or graduating from an approved training program.
- **Doctors of Optometry (OD)** are primary eye health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases and disorders of the eye, and also play a major role in maintaining the overall health and well-being of their patients. Traditional OD programs take 4 years to complete. They include both academic coursework and supervised clinical experience. (See American Optometric Association at [aoa.org/healthy-eyes/whats-a-doctor-of-optometry?](https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/whats-a-doctor-of-optometry?))
- **Ophthalmologists** are medical (MD) or osteopathic (DO) doctors who specialize in eye and vision care. Typical training for an ophthalmologist includes a four-year college degree followed by four years of medical school and at least four additional years of medical and surgical training. (See American Academy of Ophthalmology at [aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/what-is-ophthalmologist?](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/what-is-ophthalmologist?))

An Important Part of Caring For Your Eyes, Vision, and Overall Health

An in-person, comprehensive eye exam with a Doctor of Optometry includes a range of tests in order to do a complete evaluation of the health of your eyes and your vision. Not only can your optometrist assess your eye health, but optometrists are often the first doctor to identify other health conditions because they can see many things in the eye that are not visible elsewhere. If they identify a systemic health condition, they can work with a patient's overall health care team to ensure appropriate follow-up care.

A Diverse Career

Optometrists are experiencing diversification in optometry roles, expanding beyond traditional practice settings such as offices or optical goods stores. Optometrists now have opportunities in various sectors, including corporate, academia, research, and public health.

For example, you could:

- Conduct research to help develop innovative products and services, ensuring optimal visual outcomes.
- Specialize in neuro-optometry to help patients with visual defects due to disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and other neurological complications.
- Specialize in pediatric or geriatric optometry to serve the vision needs of children or the elderly.
- Specialize in sports vision optometry to help athletes enhance their visual skills to improve performance.
- Develop and implement public health programs within your community.

There are lots of diverse opportunities!

Planning for a Career in Optometry

Chart a course to an extraordinary career by preparing as soon as you can. In middle and high school, take courses in STEM — science, technology, engineering, and math. Consider volunteering in a vision center or an eye doctor's office. Many factors go into choosing a medical specialty such as optometry, including personal history, clinical interests, duration of the training involved, career opportunities, and financial and work-life balance considerations. See the results of a survey of practicing optometrists to look at some critical factors that might help influence your decision to pursue optometry as a profession: latinosoptometry.org/students/career-considerations-in-optometry/.

Learn More

To find out more about educational requirements for and careers in optometry, visit Latinos en Optometry at latinosoptometry.org/students. You can also hear directly from an optometrist through The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) Eye Opener Session. Sign up at eyeopenersession.org to connect one-on-one with an OD. From short, online conversations to in-person shadowing opportunities, it's a simple, no-pressure way to find out what it's like to be an eye doctor.

