

IS YOUR EYE TEST GOOD ENOUGH?

WHAT SHOULD A VISIT TO THE OPTICAL STORE ENTAIL?

WE VISIT SIX TO COMPARE THE STANDARDS.

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20/30

20/25

20/20

1

2

3

4

5

6

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If a visit to the optical shop for you is just about shopping for new spectacle frames, it's time to consider: What are you getting from your eye check? Why do some optometrists take 10 minutes to finish an eye check while others take 20? Why do their test methods differ? And even more puzzling: Why do different optometrists sometimes give you different prescriptions?

For the uninitiated, what you go through in the small testing room is called a subjective refraction test. Yes, it's the test where you put on a pair of weird-looking glasses with interchangeable lenses. It is "subjective" because the results are dependent on how effective the communication is between the patient and the person conducting the eye check. Furthermore, going to an optical store is not just about correcting your vision; it is also the time to ask about your general eye health, which optometrists are trained to advise on. Siow Kalin, principal optometrist at Singapore National Eye Centre, tells us what to bear in mind the next time we head to the optical store:

* Basic tests

Checking for visual acuity calls for the subjective refraction test. Contact lens wearers would have their eyes examined with a slit lamp – where a blue light is shone into the eyes to check for corneal injuries.

* Competency

An optometrist has at least a diploma in optometry, and is allowed to carry out the subjective refraction test, fit glasses and contact lenses, and examine your eyes for any visual defects. An optician is allowed to dispense glasses, and do eyesight checks; those with a Contact Lens Practitioners' license can prescribe contact lenses.

Both should be able to complete the subjective refraction test, and check your eye condition without difficulties in a short span of time – and without tiring your eyes out. The optometrist should also be quick in picking up eye conditions and refer you to an ophthalmologist for further investigation when necessary.

* Advice as needed

Your optometrist or contact lens practitioner should be able to give you comprehensive advice on eyecare, especially if you're a contact lens wearer.

* Don't judge a book by its cover

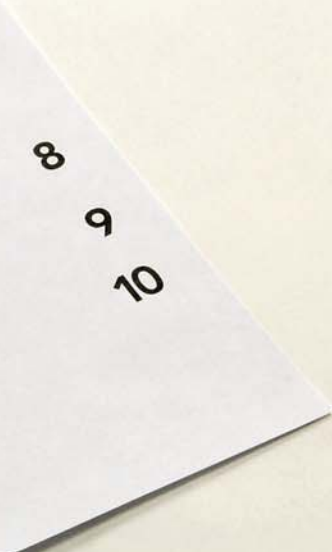
It's not how big or fancy an optical store is that matters. Even in old or rundown stores, there are very experienced opticians who do a great job of checking your eyes.

* Be registered

Opticians and optometrists that run the practice must be registered with the Optometrist and Opticians Board, which is now governed by the Ministry of Health.



Good eyecare specialists
are as precious as perfect
eyesight.



THE CHECKLIST

We visited six optical stores, and found that even though the various optometrists didn't differ in their prescriptions, our visits did throw up some differences. Here's a look:

MOST COMPREHENSIVE

■ Integrated Eyecare Centre

WHERE: #01-60, VivoCity **TEL:** 6270-5665

TEST: Other than the subjective refraction and slit-lamp examination, there are others such as the Near Addition Determination Test to check for presbyopia – the condition where the eye has a diminished ability to focus on near objects with age – or *lao hua yan*; this uses a close-up line chart and reading chart. To check for glaucoma, a quick gust of air is blown into your eyes during the eye-pressure test. To check for eye diseases such as macular degeneration and glaucoma, a digital fundus camera is used to photograph your retina.

TIME TAKEN: 35 minutes

COST: \$80; \$40 if glasses or contact lenses are purchased. A primary eye check to test your eyesight is also available at \$25 (waived if glasses or contact lenses are purchased).

VERDICT: You'll get a thorough understanding of the health of your eyes from the optometrist. It's also the only optical store that tested for presbyopia.

TIP: "Our job is to be your first line of primary eyecare," says Chew Wai Kwong, optometrist and professional affairs manager. "We are more well-placed than GPs to refer eye problems to ophthalmologists or eye surgeons because we have the necessary equipment."

BEST VALUE

■ Eye Boutique

WHERE: 8 Nutmeg Road **TEL:** 6733-5180

TEST: As thorough as the tests done at Integrated Eyecare Centre. They also check for Near Point of Convergence by resting the end of a long rod on the nose bridge, and moving an attached target towards the face. To check for pupil movement, testers are asked to focus on a pen tip while the optometrist moves it from side to side. This helps to check the health of the optic nerves. The optometrist manually uses a small condensing lens to see through to the back of your eyes. This allows for a three-dimensional view to check for irregularities in the optic nerve head, a sign of glaucoma.

TIME TAKEN: 25 minutes

COST: \$28

VERDICT: The comprehensive eye check is a steal at \$28. As the optometrists also help out at the eye clinic next door, they are able to advise you well on eye diseases and lasik.

TIP: "Try not to change your optometrist so he can track the changes in your eyesight and eye health, and refer you to the doctors if necessary," says Martin Kwan, manager and optometrist.

QUICK AND FUSS-FREE

■ Eyeplay

WHERE: #04-11, The Heeren **TEL:** 6732-6885

TEST: Basic subjective refraction

TIME TAKEN: 10 minutes

COST: \$15, waived if glasses or contact lenses are purchased

VERDICT: During our visit, the optometrist was clear



what's that for? Here's a look at the strange-looking equipment your optometrist may use and their purposes.

■ FOR MYOPIA: Snellen chart

This is the chart with rows of letters in diminishing sizes. You should be seated at eye level with the chart and 6m away from it.

■ FOR ASTIGMATISM: Jackson Cross Cylinder

A lens, mounted in a ring, is flipped around a few times to assess your degree of refractive error.

■ FOR NEAR READING: Reading chart

Usually done if you're in your late 30s. You'll be asked to read a chart at your habitual reading distance, which is about 30 to 40cm.

■ FOR CONTACT LENS WEARERS: Slit lamp with blue light

This checks your corneal health. The test may also pick up conditions like cataracts and macular degeneration.

and precise in communicating with the customer, so the test was completed in a snap. Also, if you've been avoiding plastic frames because the stiff nose pads don't sit well on your nose, Eye Play can shave them off and attach nose-friendly ones to your frame (for an extra \$50) – a service not available in most stores.

TIP: "Get your eyes checked in the morning or early afternoon when they're not tired," says optometrist Tay Hui Ling. "Tired eyes can give you inaccurate results."

WE ALSO RECOMMEND

■ Paris Miki

WHERE: #B1-10, Liang Court

TEL: 6338-0636

TEST: Basic subjective refraction and slit lamp examination.

TIME TAKEN: 15 to 20 minutes

COST: Free of charge; \$20 if you require the optometrist to issue a referral to an ophthalmologist.

VERDICT: Disposable plastic sheets were placed on the chin rests of testing machines for hygiene purposes. The optometrist worked her way up from a lower power to avoid over-prescribing the lenses' power – a cause of headaches. While the attention to detail was good, it was slightly tiring to sit through the lengthier refraction test.

TIP: Don't ignore what our eyes tell you. "If you find that you can't see clearly when working on the computer, it could be a sign of an eye disorder or deteriorating eye sight. Get your eyes checked to determine the treatment you need," says optometrist Elaine Lee.

■ Nanyang Optical

WHERE: #B1-58/59/60, Parkway Parade

TEL: 6440-0566

TEST: Basic refraction test and slit lamp examination

TIME TAKEN: 10 minutes

COST: \$25, waived if glasses or contact lenses are purchased

VERDICT: The check was quick but a couple of times, the optometrist interjected with statements like, "It's clearer, right?" before the tester responded to the question. However, the final result did not differ from the other optometrists'.

TIP: If you're uncomfortable with the prescription, or

* questions you should ask at your next eye check

■ WHO'S THE ONE DOING MY EYE CHECK, AN OPTICIAN OR AN OPTOMETRIST?

An optician can fit glasses and conduct subjective refraction tests. Contact lens wearers should request to be seen by an optometrist or contact lens practitioners (an optician with the license to dispense contact lenses).

■ WHAT ARE THE TESTS YOU'RE DOING FOR ME?

Even if you don't ask, the optician or optometrist should be able to explain each step of the process to you.

■ WHY ARE MY EYES ACTING UP?

Detail any discomfort in the eyes or problems in seeing. Volunteer your family history of eye diseases.



Ask your eyecare specialist for a detailed explanation of the eye tests.

if the trial lenses make you feel giddy when you're walking around, do the eye test again on another day to confirm the result, says optometrist Edith Ho.

■ Insight Optical

WHERE: #B1-70/71, Raffles City Shopping Centre

TEL: 6339-7265

TEST: Basic subjective refraction. At the start, the optometrist uses a retinoscope to shine light into the tester's eyes to get an estimate of the degree of short-sightedness.

TIME TAKEN: 10 minutes

COST: Free

VERDICT: Quick, efficient, and the optometrist answered our questions very eloquently. But being the upmarket brother of Optical 88, the average price for a pair of designer-brand glasses was about \$500.

TIP: "Make sure you take off your contact lenses at least 15 minutes before going in for an eye check," says manager and optometrist Steven Seah. "Contact lenses can sometimes cause your cornea to swell and result in poor resolution, and hence, inaccurate results."