

Ophthalmic Dispensing Optician

Includes:

- Ophthalmic dispensing optician
- Ophthalmic laboratory technician

Ophthalmic dispensing opticians adapt and fit corrective eyewear, including eyeglasses and contact lenses, as prescribed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist. They help customers select appropriate frames, then prepare work orders for ophthalmic laboratory technicians, who grind and insert lenses into frames. The dispensing optician then adjusts the finished eyewear to fit customer needs.

Career Description

The ophthalmic dispensing optician combines an understanding of the human eye and vision with customer service skills to order the production of corrective eyewear, aid the patient/customer in selecting appropriate, aesthetically pleasing frames, and adjust the frames to fit the customer's face.

Chief duties of the dispensing optician:

- Analyze and interpret prescriptions
- Communicate effectively with patient/customer
- Determine facial and eye measurements
- Identify the human eye structure, function, and pathology
- Assist the customer in selecting appropriate frames and lenses by assessing individual patient needs
- Use an ophthalmologist's or optometrist's prescription to prepare work orders for the ophthalmic laboratory technician
- Deliver prescription eyewear/vision aids and instruct customers in use and care
- Maintain patient/customer records and address complaints
- Provide follow-up services, including eyewear adjustment, repair, and replacement
- Explain theory of refraction
- Identify procedures associated with dispensing artificial eyes and low vision aids, when appropriate
- Adapt, dispense, and fit contact lenses
- Assist in various business duties, including frame and lens inventory, supply and equipment maintenance, and patient insurance/claim forms submission and record keeping
- Apply rules for equipment safety

Employment Characteristics

Dispensing opticians work 40-hour weeks in retail stores, some of which may offer one-stop eye examinations, frames, and on-the-spot lens grinding and fitting, or are self-employed in other optical field areas, such as sales/marketing. Other dispensing opticians provide their eye care services in conjunction with optometrists and ophthalmologists at eye care centers.

Salary

Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) for May 2009 show that wages at the 10th percentile were \$21,120, the 50th percentile (median) at \$32,740, and the 90th percentile at \$50,560 (www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes292081.htm). Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of dispensing opticians (from largest to smallest) were:

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| • General merchandise stores | \$38,810 |
| • Offices of physicians | \$36,430 |
| • Health and personal care stores | \$36,190 |
| • Department stores | \$32,630 |
| • Offices of other health professionals | \$32,050 |

For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.

Employment Outlook

The BLS projects that employment is expected to rise 13 percent through 2018, about as fast as average for all occupations. Middle age is a time when many individuals use corrective lenses for the first time, and elderly persons generally require more vision care than others. As the share of the population in these older age groups increases and as people live longer, more opticians will be needed to provide service to them. In addition, awareness of the importance of regular eye exams is increasing across all age groups, especially children and those over the age of 65. Recent trends indicate a movement toward a "low vision" society, where a growing number of people view things that are closer in distance, such as computer monitors, over the course of an average day. This trend is expected to increase the need for eye care services. Fashion also influences demand. Frames come in a growing variety of styles, colors, and sizes, encouraging people to buy more than one pair.

Somewhat moderating the need for optician services is the increasing use of laser surgery to correct vision problems. Although the surgery remains relatively more expensive than eyewear, patients who successfully undergo this surgery may not require glasses or contact lenses for several years. Also, new technology is allowing workers to make the

measurements needed to fit glasses and therefore allowing dispensing opticians to work faster, limiting the need for more workers.

Overall, the need to replace dispensing opticians who retire or leave the occupation will result in very good job prospects. Employment opportunities for opticians in offices of optometrists—the largest employer—will be particularly good.

Job opportunities also will be good at general merchandise stores, because this segment is expected to experience much faster than average growth, as well as high turnover due to less favorable working conditions, such as long hours and mandatory weekend shifts.

Nonetheless, the number of job openings overall will be somewhat limited because the occupation is small. Also, dispensing opticians are vulnerable to changes in the business cycle because eyewear purchases often can be deferred for a time. Job prospects will be best for those who have certification and those who have completed a formal opticianry program. Job candidates with extensive knowledge of new technology, including new refraction systems, framing materials, and edging techniques, should also experience favorable conditions.

Educational Programs

Length. Ophthalmic dispensing optician degree programs require two years of study.

Prerequisites. A high school diploma or its equivalent is generally required for entrance into a program. Ophthalmic dispensing optician students should be familiar with the principles of physics, biology, algebra, and geometry.

Curriculum. Ophthalmic dispensing opticianry educational programs include instruction in geometrical optics; ophthalmic optics; anatomy of the eye; and the use of optical instruments, machinery, and tools.

Inquiries

Careers

American Board of Opticianry
6506 Loisdale Road, #209
Springfield, VA 22150
(703) 719-5800
www.abo-ncle.org

National Academy of Opticianry
8401 Corporate Drive, Suite 605
Landover, MD 20785
(800) 229-4828
www.nao.org

National Federation of Opticianry Schools

2800 Springport Road
Jackson, MI 49202
(517) 990-6945
www.nfos.org

Opticians Association of America
441 Carlisle Drive
Herndon VA 20170
(703) 437 8780
www.oaa.org

Program Accreditation

Commission on Opticianry Accreditation (COA)
PO Box 592
Canton, NY 13617
(703) 468-0566
E-mail: director@COAccreditation.com
www.COAccreditation.com

Note: Adapted in part from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, Opticians, Dispensing, at www.bls.gov/oco/ocos098.htm.