

# Are your eyes roadworthy?

Good eyesight is essential for safe driving.
As a driver, your eyesight needs to meet the UK Government's standards of vision for driving.

It is recommended that you have an eye test every two years.







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Having good eyesight is essential to safe driving. Yet some drivers fail to get their eyes tested regularly, some going years or even decades without checking their vision is up to scratch. Others put themselves and others in danger by driving without their glasses or lenses.

Brake's sharpen up campaign, supported by RSA and Specsavers, calls on drivers to ensure their vision is at a safe standard for driving, and calls on the government to introduce compulsory eyesight tests for drivers.

As part of the campaign, Brake, RSA and Specsavers surveyed 1,000 UK drivers on their eyesight and their opinions on compulsory testing. The survey was conducted by Surveygoo.

#### **DRIVER EYESIGHT**

#### RESEARCH SHOWS...

Crash risk is heightened by poor vision<sup>1</sup>, for obvious reasons: if you cannot see well, you may not see a hazard or person in time to stop, or you may not be able to respond to the environment around you at all.

Road crashes caused by poor driver vision are estimated to cause 2,900 casualties and cost £33 million in the UK per year $^2$ .

Vision problems are very common – almost three quarters (74%) of people in the UK either wear glasses or contact lenses, or have had laser eye surgery to correct their vision $^3$ . Long- or short-sightedness is the most common $^4$ , and can affect anyone at any age.

Several health conditions, including age-related macular degeneration, cataract and glaucoma, can cause serious and sometimes permanent damage to eyesight. These conditions are more common in people aged over 50, but can affect younger people too.

### Q1: If you require glasses or lenses for driving, do you always wear them while driving?

Of the 46% of drivers who say they need glasses or lenses for driving, a worrying one in eight (12%) admit driving without them in the past 12 months.

Of the 54% who say they don't need glasses or lenses for driving, one in three (33%) hasn't had an eye test in the past two years, so cannot be sure that they are safe to drive without corrective lenses.

- 36% don't need glasses or lenses for driving, and have had an eye sight test in the past two years
- 18% don't need glasses or lenses for driving, but haven't had an eyesight test in the past two years
- 41% need glasses or lenses for driving, and always wear them
- 3% need glasses or lenses for driving, but have driven without them once or twice in the past 12 months
- 2% need glasses or lenses for driving, but have driven without them numerous times in the past 12 months

#### **BRAKE'S ADVICE**

If you need glasses or lenses you must always wear them when driving, even on short journeys. Keep a spare pair of glasses in your vehicle if you're prone to forget them.

#### Natalie's story

Natalie Wade, 28, from Rochford, Essex, was killed by a partially sighted driver in February 2006. She was knocked down on a pedestrian crossing, along with her mother, Christine Gutberlet, by 78 year old John Thorpe. Christine survived, but Natalie suffered severe brain damage from which she died in intensive care on Valentine's Day. The bride-to-be was shopping for her wedding dress when she was hit.

Driver John Thorpe was blind in one eye and had 40 defects in the other, but had not declared his sight problems to the DVLA. He died of natural causes before his trial could be completed. The inquest returned a verdict of unlawful killing.

Natalie's family have been campaigning for changes in the law to prevent similar tragedies. Natalie's aunt, Revd Brenda Gutberlet, says: "Natalie was a wonderful, bubbly young woman, full of life and laughter. She was lovely to be around. The years since her death have been a rollercoaster, for Natalie's parents and for all her family and friends. It's hard to put into words what it has been like.

"Natalie's death, like so many on our roads, was completely avoidable. The question every driver should ask before they get behind the wheel is: am I fit to drive today? But not everyone is honest with themselves. To get behind the wheel of a vehicle unable to see shows a disregard for the lives of others, and it can't be right that we still allow drivers to do so."

#### **EYESIGHT TESTING**

#### **RESEARCH SHOWS...**

Changes in eyesight can be gradual, and it is possible to lose up to 40% of your vision before noticing it. Hence experts recommend having a professional eye test at least every two years to ensure good eyesight for safe driving.

A professional eye test not only checks vision over distance, but can also check for defects such as problems seeing things in your central or peripheral vision, known as visual field defects. Visual field defects can be caused by illnesses such as glaucoma, retinal disease or cataract.

Drivers with visual field defects have double the incidence of road crashes and traffic violations compared to drivers with a full visual field, and almost half of people with visual field loss are unaware of the problem<sup>7</sup>.

#### Q2: When did you last have an eyesight test by an optician?

One in four (25%) drivers hasn't had a vision test in the past two years. One in eight (12%) admit not visiting the optician for five years or more, or never, and 4% (the equivalent to more than 1.5 million UK drivers<sup>8</sup>) have never had their eyes tested. This means a huge proportion of drivers can't be sure their eyesight is up to scratch.

- 50% said in the last year
- 24% said between one and two years ago
- 8% said between two and three years ago
- 5% said between three and five years ago
- 5% said between five and 10 years ago
- 3% said more than 10 years ago
- 4% have never had their eyes tested

### Q3: How regularly do you usually get your eyesight tested by an optician?

Two in three (66%) drivers visit an optician at least every two years, in accordance with expert advice. However, almost one in five (18%) say they never go or hardly ever, or only go when they notice a problem. This is worrying as eyesight can deteriorate severely before you notice a problem.

- 26% said once a year at least
- 40% said every two years
- 14% said every three to five years
- 2% said every five to 10 years
- 6% said only if they notice a problem
- 12% said never or hardly ever



### Q4: Have you ever noticed problems with your vision but put off visiting the opticians?

An alarming one in five (19%) drivers have put off visiting an optician when noticing problems with their vision, for a variety of reasons, putting themselves and others in real danger when they get behind the wheel.

- 8% said yes, because they were worried about the cost of an eye exam, glasses or contact lenses
- 6% said yes, because they were busy
- 3% said yes, because they were worried they would find something seriously wrong
- 3% said yes, because of other reasons
- 2% said yes, because they were worried it would mean they couldn't continue driving
- 81% said they'd always immediately booked an eye test when noticing vision problems, or they'd never noticed problems with their vision

#### BRAKE'S ADVICE

If you drive, regular visits to the opticians are essential to ensure your eyesight meets legal standards, and you're not putting yourself and others at great risk. It also helps to catch early signs of eye disease so they can be treated before they become a major problem.

You should get your eyes checked by an optician at least every two years, or straight away if you notice any problems. Do not be tempted to put off visiting the opticians – most vision problems are easily corrected, and the sooner you know the problem, the sooner it can be fixed. Regular eye tests can also help identify other health conditions, such as high blood pressure.

Going to the optician needn't be expensive and may be free – eye sight tests are free in the UK if you are under 16, over 60, claiming certain benefits, or if you have certain medical conditions. See the NHS website to find out if you qualify. Eye tests are free for all UK residents in Scotland. If you are not entitled to free tests, many high street opticians run promotions offering free or cheap tests.

If you regularly use computer screens for significant periods at work, you are entitled to ask your employer to pay for your eye tests, under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992. If you drive for work, your employer may also have made arrangements for free or discounted eye tests.



#### Cassie's story

**Cassie McCord** was just 16 when she was knocked down and killed by a driver with defective eyesight. Colin Horsfall, 87, had been stopped three days earlier and police found he was unable to read a number plate at 20 metres. They asked if he would surrender his licence, but were unable to persuade him.

Cassie, who wanted to become a lawyer, was hit on the pavement as she walked to college in February 2011. She died from severe head injuries the next day. Horsfall died from his injuries three months later.

Since Cassie's death, her mum Jackie McCord has campaigned for Cassie's Law, to help police get drivers with defective eyesight off roads quicker. This resulted in a new procedure making it faster for police to report potential problems with driver eyesight.

Jackie is also supporting Brake's sharpen up campaign, calling for drivers to get their eyesight tested every two years, and urging all drivers who need to wear glasses or lenses to do so at all times when driving.

#### **EYESIGHT REGULATIONS**

#### **UK REGULATIONS**

In the UK, drivers must be able to read a modern car number plate (made after 1 September 2001) from 20 metres away?. This does not test for visual field and contrast sensitivity, both of which are important to safe driving.

The number plate test is only carried out when someone takes their driving test, plus it may be conducted by police at the roadside if they suspect an eyesight problem. So following their driving test, a driver may never need to produce any further evidence that they can see well enough to drive. Drivers aged over 70 have to declare when renewing their licence that their eyesight meets minimum legal standards, but do not have to provide evidence of this.

It is estimated up to five million UK drivers would fail a number plate test if they had to take it again  $^{10}$ . 5,916 drivers had their licence revoked for failing to meet minimum eyesight standards in 2011  $^{17}$ .

Drivers have to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) if their vision (with glasses or lenses if needed) is below 6/12 (0.5) on the Snellen scale, or their horizontal visual field is less than 120° ½. Certain medical conditions, such as glaucoma or cataracts, also need to be reported to the DVLA, who will conduct an assessment to determine if the driver is safe. Full details of medical conditions that must be reported are at www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving.

Lorry and bus drivers have to meet higher vision standards than other drivers. They must have vision of at least 6/7.5 (0.8) in their best eye and at least 6/60 (0.1) in the other eye, with glasses with

Continued→

#### **UK REGULATIONS (Continued)**

corrective power not more than (+) 8 dioptres or with contact lenses of any strength. They must have a horizontal visual field of at least 160° degrees, at least 70° left and right and 30° up and down, and no visual defects within the central 30°13.

There is no routine testing of driver eyesight at the scene of a crash by police. If drivers are tested using the number plate method, this will only pick up problems with distance vision, not defects in visual fields, or sensitivity to contrast or glare.

#### Q5: How often do you check your vision using the number plate test?

Almost half (49%) of drivers check their distance vision using the number plate test at least once every two years. However, one in four has not used this method since passing their driving test.

- 22% do this at least every six months
- 17% do this annually
- 10% do this every two years
- 24% do not do this regularly, but have done it at least once since passing their driving test
- 26% have not done the number plate test since passing their driving test

Q6: Do you think driving test candidates should have to provide proof of a recent, full eyesight test by an optician, which accurately assesses distance and peripheral vision and checks for other vision problems?

Two thirds (67%) agree that driving test candidates should be required to produce evidence of recent, comprehensive sight tests when taking their driving test.

- 67% said yes
- 33% said no

Q7: Should drivers have to prove their vision meets minimum legal standards for safe driving by providing evidence of a recent sight test when they renew their driving licence or licence photocard?

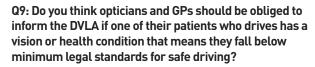
Nearly nine in 10 (87%) agree that drivers should be required to produce evidence of recent sight tests when renewing licences.

- 87% said yes
- 13% said no

Q8: Do you think opticians and GPs should be obliged to let patients know if their vision or health conditions mean they are falling below legal requirements for safe driving?

The vast majority (94%) believe GPs and opticians should be obliged to inform patients if their vision or health conditions could be putting them at risk when driving.

- 94% said yes
- 6% said no



More than three quarters (76%) think opticians and GPs should have to inform the DVLA if the vision of a patient who drivers falls below the minimum legal standard due to a vision or health condition.

- 76% said ves
- 24% said no

#### **BRAKE'S ADVICE**

If your optician or GP mentions any problems with your vision, or health conditions that could affect your vision, let them know if you drive and ask if your vision is at risk of falling below the minimum safe standards for driving. Visit www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving to find out what must be reported and ask your GP or optician if unsure.

The number plate test is a simple, quick way to check if your distance vision meets legal standards. However, this test will not identify other vision problems such as visual field defects, so full, professional eye tests at least every two years are still essential.

#### BRAKE'S CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

Brake calls on the government to introduce a requirement for drivers to provide proof of a recent, professional eye test when applying for their provisional licence, to ensure all new drivers meet appropriate standards.

Brake is also campaigning for compulsory regular eye tests for drivers throughout their driving career. Brake proposes that drivers should have to produce evidence of a recent eye test when renewing their licence photocard every 10 years. It's been estimated this would save the public purse at least £6.7 million a year by preventing crashes14.

The government should also raise awareness among drivers about the importance and benefits of getting eyes tested at least every two years or straight away if you notice a problem. This could include reminders in communications from the DVLA, such as tax disc renewal letters.

#### End notes

- 1. Detailed cost-benefit analysis of potential impairment countermeasures: research in the framework of the European research programme IMMORTAL, SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research, 2005
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- Driving licence data, DVLA, March 2014
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- 13. Driving eyesight rules, DVLA, 2014
- 14. Fit to Drive: a cost benefit analysis of more frequent eyesight testing for UK drivers, RSA Insurance Group plc, 2012

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### What the clients wanted

Fleet 21 wanted a way to help their member companies test the eyesight of their staff drive



Fleet 21 is one of the UK's leading drivingrisk management consultancies and they run awareness programmes for drivers to improve their driving. Advisers include magistrates, occupational health professionals, lawyers and fleet managers. They work with many organisations across the UK, which have many thousands of drivers among them.

Having eyesight that is good enough for driving is a key component of ensuring driver safety and is at the core of any driving-risk management programme they run. As such, Fleet 21 wanted to be able to provide their members with the facility to test their drivers' eyes. They needed a solution that was easy to administer and easy to communicate.

They also wanted to work with a company that would be recognised and trusted by their members. In essence, they needed a straightforward solution to be able to offer eye tests to their members' drivers. As an educator in their field, they were also looking for support to provide information, within their training programme, on the importance of eyesight for driving.

#### Review

We met with the management team and reviewed our different working practices and what support we could offer that would help the company communicate the eyecare message. Through the review process we found that there were a number of opportunities for Specsavers Corporate Eyecare to support Fleet 21.

Fleet 21 runs training workshops, distributes training information, produces a driving magazine and attends regular health and safety events. We reviewed all of these and proposed a number of different areas where there were synergies between our companies and we were able to offer support in all these areas.

#### Solution

eVouchers from Specsavers Corporate
Eyecare were the perfect solution to provide
eye sight tests for Fleet 21's members.
Specsavers' trusted reputation and high
profile were important factors for Fleet
21, as it sought to identify an external
company with which it could happily align.
The company was also keen to work with
Specsavers, as it is such a well-known,
trusted and highly respected company.
This was an important consideration for
Fleet 21 in aligning with an external company.



The eVoucher system is incredibly straightforward for Fleet 21 to communicate to its members and is very easy to use. The whole process of administering eVouchers is carried out online. This includes ordering the eVouchers, paying for them, allocating them to staff and distributing them to staff: all online. Staff can even redeem their eVouchers online, using their smartphone if they wish.

The process is backed up by a full management system which includes online redemption reports, so the company can track their employees' requirements and even identify when their next appointment is scheduled. Fleet 21's member companies administer the whole process themselves, which makes life easy for Fleet 21 and they can be confident that their members have an easy-to-use system to test their drivers' eyesight. We were also able to support Fleet 21 in a number of areas to raise awareness of the importance of eyesight for driving.

#### Results

A central element to the Fleet 21 training is their compliance pack. This includes all the important details for their member companies to be legally compliant and ensure they have safe drivers on the roads. Details of the Specsavers Corporate Eyecare eVouchers are included in all their compliance packs which go to all their corporate members and staff. Details of the eVouchers have been distributed to all Fleet 21's members.

Fleet 21's alliance with Specsavers has helped raise their profile among their potential client bank. We have worked together on a number of campaigns: Fleet 21 produces a regular magazine on all issues of road safety and we have developed a number of features on the importance of eyesight for them to use.

Specsavers has also supplied Driver Toolkits to Fleet 21's clients, which give them extra information on their obligations as employers and tools to help communicate their eyecare policy.

We have also run a number of joint workshops on the importance of eyesight and driving at health and safety events in partnership with Fleet 21.

It was important for Fleet 21 to 'walk the talk' and ensure all their own staff had eyesight adequate for driving. As such, they have made eVouchers available to all their own staff as well.

## **Driver Eyecare**

Having adequate eyesight is one of the most basic requirements for safe driving. Experience, skill and driver training are worthless if the driver cannot see clearly.

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As an employer, it is important that you ensure your drivers' are fully fit to drive.

#### Risk

A third of all collisions involve someone driving for work purposes. This equates to 20 people killed and 220 seriously injured, every week, in collisions involving someone who was driving for work1.

- In the UK each year, there are estimated to be around 2,000 road accidents due to poor driver vision. These are estimated to cause 3,000 casualties and cost the UK economy approximately £32.9 million.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly 6,000 licences a year are revoked because of poor eyesight<sup>3</sup>
- More than 1.5 million licence holders have never had their eyes tested<sup>4</sup>

#### Responsibility

The HSE clearly states that health and safety laws apply to all aspects of work activities.<sup>5</sup> This means that the employer has a responsibility for driver safety, whether the employee is driving a company car or their own vehicle, as part of their main working role or to pop to the post office or meet a client.

The employers' duty of care goes beyond ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy and that employees have a valid driver's licence and insurance. The employer, in fact, has a responsibility to ensure that each employee is fit to drive.

#### Requirement

Being able to see clearly is the most basic requirement for safe driving. It is, however, often disregarded. Poor eyesight can occur very gradually and can easily go unnoticed by the individual. The only way to be sure that vision is adequate for driving is to regularly have a full eye examination.

#### **Drivers must:**

- Be able to read (with glasses or contact lenses, if necessary) a number plate from 20 metres (This is for the newstyle number plate, made from 1st September 2001.)<sup>6</sup>
- Meet the minimum eyesight standard for driving by having a visual acuity of at least decimal 0.5 (6/12) measured on the Snellen Scale (with glasses or contact lenses, if necessary).<sup>6</sup>
- Have an adequate field of vision, which can only be tested properly by a trained professional.
- Wear their glasses or contact lenses if required for driving.
- Notify the DVLA of any conditions that affect both eyes. Different standards apply for lorry and bus drivers

Driving with eyesight below the required standard could lead to a driving ban and prosecution.<sup>7</sup>

#### Eyesight impairment

Eyesight can be impaired in several ways:

- Vision may become clouded or blurred
- The driver may struggle to see objects clearly at certain distances
- Blind spots may occur anywhere within the field of vision

These impairments may be due to a variety of

causes, some of which are temporary or treatable and others may be of a permanent and deteriorating nature. Causes may include:

- Tiredness
- Drugs or medication
- Ageing
- Eye diseases, like macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma
- Other medical conditions, like migraines, diabetes, heart disease

#### Eyecare provision:

- The human cost of collisions is of course immeasurable and employee safety must always be at the forefront of an employer's mind.
- Providing regular, company-funded, eyecare is the best way to ensure the employer meets their duty of care.
- Eyecare does not have to be costly.
   Employers can purchase a Driver Eyecare
   eVoucher from Specsavers Corporate Eyecare
   for just £35. This entitles the employee to an eye test and £65 towards a pair of glasses\*.
- Reductions in insurance premiums may be available for employers who implement an eyecare policy for drivers.
- Failing to provide eyecare can prove extremely costly in terms of uninsured losses: fines, sick pay, lost time, damage of product, temporary labour, increased premiums, etc.

#### Eyecare considerations:

- An eye test will consider not only visual acuity (sight over distance) but also peripheral vision and the ability to switch focus between near and far objects (such as the dashboard controls and the road), for example. For driving, the ability to cope with glare and different levels of contrast is also important.
- A full eye examination can detect a huge range of ocular conditions, including cataract, glaucoma, retinal detachment, optic neuritis, ocular tumours.

- It can also help to monitor the whole body and detect systemic conditions, such as, diabetes, raised blood pressure, high cholesterol, brain tumours, thyroid problems, multiple sclerosis.
- Eyecare can be a big factor in preventative care and reducing sick leave.

#### Eyecare policies:

- Include eyesight in driving riskassessments.
- Implement strict eyecare policies for all employees who drive in the course of their work.
- Provide a definition of the standards of an eyesight test, in line with the International Council of Ophthalmology and road traffic laws.
- Include a requirement for drivers to notify their employer of any changes in eyesight.
- Consider including eye tests in pre-employment checks.
- Define the frequency required for eye tests.
  - Eye examinations should take place at least every two years.
  - A perceived deterioration should be investigated straight away.
  - Regular eyecare should be provided to all ages but is particularly important for those over the age of 45.
- Communicate the eyecare policy in Driver Handbooks, safety notices, on the company intranet and using attention-grabbing posters.
- Eyecare events are a good way to provide information and advice to drivers. Ask an optician to attend the event to provide on-the-spot vision screening for employees.
- It should go without saying but,
   make it clear that those who require
   glasses or contact lenses to drive must
   wear them.

#### Employee advice

To improve driving vision, there are a few things the individual can do in addition to having regular eye examinations.

- Keep the windscreen and mirrors clean and scratch-free inside and out.
- Keep headlamps clean and check that bulbs are working and adjusted to the correct height.
- At night, do not look directly at the lights of oncoming traffic. The glare can impede your vision once the vehicle has passed.
   For those who need corrected vision to drive:
- Never drive without required glasses
- Keep a spare pair of glasses in the vehicle
- Keep a pair of prescription sunglasses in the vehicle
- Choose glasses with thin rims and arms so your field of vision is not restricted.
   Anti-reflective coatings are also available to reduce glare at night
- RoSPA information 'Driving for work: fitness to drive'. http://www.rospa.com/ roadsafety/info/workfitness.pdf 2007
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- 3. Question to Parliament, Meg Munn MP, 13/12/ 2012
- 4. Brake's driver eyesight survey 2014
- 5. HSE guidelines 'Driving at work' 04/2014
- Gov.uk Driver Eyesight Rules, last updated 12/11/2014
- 7. DVLA A guide to standards of vision for driving cars and motorcycles (Group 1) 08/2014

\*Terms of Specsavers Driver's Eyecare eVoucher Each £35 eVoucher provides a full eye examination at any Specsavers practice.

If glasses are required, the employee will be able to select a pair of glasses from the £45 range, fitted with PENTAX CR39 single vision lenses plus scratch-resistant treatment, as standard. Alternatively, your employees can use the £45 contribution towards a pair of glasses from a higher-priced range or have bifocal or varifocal lenses and simply pay the difference themselves. In addition, Premium Club, which is built into every eVoucher, offers a further £20 contribution when glasses are selected from the £99 range or above, thus giving a combined contribution of £65. Furthermore, if the eye examination

Premium Club discount applies to selected in-store offers only – cannot be used with over-60's discount, student discount, the sale or easycare. All terms for in-store offers apply. Excludes contact lenses. Vouchers are not for resale and cannot be exchanged for cash. Cannot be used by persons under 16. One voucher per transaction. UK only. For your nearest Specsavers store visit specsavers.co.uk

Specsavers Corporate Eyecare vouchers can be redeemed at any Specsavers Opticians in the UK. Excludes ROI. This voucher can be used towards an upgrade to other frame ranges, and where required, bifocal and varifocal lenses. Plano sunglasses from a selected range and subject to employer benefits policy. Cannot be exchanged in whole or in part for cash. Only one transaction per voucher. All vouchers are none transferable. The employers' duty of care goes beyond ensuring the vehicle is road-worthy and that employees have a valid driver's licence and insurance. The employer, in fact, has a responsibility to ensure that each employee is fit to drive.