

Eye Exam 101

It's called an exam. Just the word can bubble up fear and past test-taking failures. But, take it from us – eye exams aren't about making patients feel like failures. The different tests are all there for a reason, and your only failure would be in avoiding the exam to begin with.

Here's a rundown of what to expect.

- 1. Nice to meet you.** If you're a new patient, you'll probably fill out an eye and medical history form, including any symptoms you're having. The doctor will review it and talk with you more about any risks for vision problems, eye diseases or concerns with other medical conditions.
- 2. An oldie but a goodie – the Snellen Chart.** Named for the eye doctor who invented it, the Snellen Chart is the classic icon of eyecare. With its letter-filled rows ranging in size from chunky to seemingly microscopic, this chart has graced many a medical office's hallway. It's a simple test to assess your visual sharpness. The doctor will watch to see the smallest row you can see.
- 3. One or two?** This is the test known as refraction. Your doctor uses a tool called a retinoscope or a computerized vision-testing instrument. He or she will shine light into your eyes and get a read on your vision and estimate your prescription strength. After that comes the classic fine-tuning process, where your doctor uses a series of slightly different lenses in front of your eyes to check which subtle differences make you see better.
- 4. First the left, then the right.** Your eyes are a team. To see how well they work together, the doctor needs to see how each one performs on its own. You'll most likely use a little paddle known as an occluder (it's like the eye doctor's stethoscope) to block vision in one eye first, and then the other.
- 5. Color time.** Color vision is a basic building block of seeing well. But, millions of Americans – mostly men – have a color vision deficiency. It's mostly around not being able to see green or red. In this test, you'll look at special cards with colored dots that form numbers. If you see the numbers, your color vision is fine. If there's a problem, you may have a hard time seeing the number or it might be completely invisible.
- 6. The puff test.** This is the most common test for glaucoma and measures the fluid pressure inside your eyes. It just takes a split-second puff of air in each eye.
- 7. A closer look.** Your doctor may dilate your eyes with drops that make your pupils bigger. This allows your doctor to take a closer look in your eyes and look for eye and health conditions.
- 8. Zoom in.** A slit lamp, or biomicroscope, lets the doctor get a magnified view of the front and inside of your eyes. It helps your doctor check for a number of conditions, like cataracts, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy.