

Road safety factsheet: Eyesight and driving

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How many road collisions in the UK per year are caused in by defective vision?

In 2022, there were 176 collisions in which 'uncorrected, defective eyesight' was listed as a contributory factor¹. Poor vision is only recorded as a contributory factor in less than one per cent of reported collisions, although some studies estimate that approximately 1.8 million drivers have vision below the minimum legal standard².

How often should I have my eyes tested?

The general recommendation is to have an eyesight check every two years, but more often if your optician advises it. Having an eyesight test will ensure that you can meet minimum eyesight standards for driving. It can also identify common eyesight conditions and may give clues about other less common diseases.

What is the legal minimum eyesight standard for driving?

Drivers and riders of motorised vehicles must be able to read a standard number plate at 20 metres, using corrective lenses if required.

If you want to do your own number plate test, when walking down a street or in a car park, 20 metres is about five car lengths.

Are there any tell-tale signs that would indicate that I might need glasses for driving?

If you are finding it difficult to read road signs, especially those with writing on, as quickly as you used to, it could indicate that your long-distance sight has deteriorated, and you may require corrective lenses. If you find it harder to see in the dark, this may also mean you may need to wear glasses when driving.

¹ Department for Transport (2023) 'Table RAS0701: Collisions, casualties and severity, Great Britain, 2022'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-road-accidents-vehicles-and-casualties-tables-for-great-britain#full-publication-update-history> Accessed September 2023

² Optical Confederation (2011) 'Optical Confederation submission to the Transport Select Committee Inquiry into the Government's Strategic Framework for Road Safety'

Eyesight problems become more common as we grow older³, and the driving of older people is more likely to be impaired by eyesight problems. Is there anything which I can do to in addition to having corrective lenses which will help me to continue driving safely?

Poor vision causes more significant driving impairment at night. This may make it more difficult to spot pedestrians, especially if they are wearing dark clothing. You may also be affected by glare from oncoming vehicle headlights. Reducing nighttime driving can help in this instance; you may also wish to consider voluntary training.

For more information on driving safely for longer visit www.olderdrivers.org.uk

I am sometimes affected by dazzle from oncoming vehicle headlights at night. Can I wear 'nighttime driving glasses'?

Tinted lenses reduce the amount of light available to the eye, and so they are not recommended for driving at night or in conditions of poor visibility. Advertisements that suggest that such glasses are helpful for night driving or driving in fog are both inaccurate and misleading. The Highway Code advises against their use. The only occasions when such lenses should be used are on the advice or prescription of an optician or ophthalmologist.

What are the penalties for driving with eyesight that is below the required minimum legal standard?

If you drive with eyesight below the minimum legal standard, you could face a fine of up to £1000, three penalty points or a discretionary disqualification. Of course, the greatest penalty is that you might cause a collision that hurts yourself or another person. If you cause death by dangerous driving, you could face up to 18 years in prison.

Remember:

You must wear glasses or contact lenses every time you drive if you need them to meet the 'standards of vision for driving'.

You must tell DVLA if you've got any problem with your eyesight that affects both of your eyes or the remaining eye if you only have one eye.

This doesn't include being short- or long-sighted or colour blind. You also don't need to say if you've had surgery to correct short sightedness and can meet the eyesight standards.

³ Wood, J. et al (2009) 'Interaction between visual status, driver age and distracters on daytime driving performance', *Vision Res*, 49(17): 2225-2231.