

Road safety factsheet: Eyesight and driving

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How many road casualties in the UK per year are caused in some way through defective vision?

In 2020, there were 165 accidents in which 'uncorrected, defective eyesight' was listed as a contributory factor¹. Poor vision is only recorded as a contributory factor in less than 1% of reported crashes, although some studies estimate that approximately 1.8 million drivers have vision below the minimum legal standard².

A review of research about eyesight and driving from the Road Safety Observatory can be found [here](#).

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, but also usually identify the majority of common eyesight conditions, and may also give clues about other less common diseases.

What is the legal standard for driving?

Drivers and riders of motorised vehicles must be able to read a standard new style number plate at a distance of 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.

On an old style licence plate, the distance is 20.5 metres.

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 has deteriorated and you may require corrective lenses. If you find it harder to see in the dark, this may also mean you need to wear glasses when driving.

¹ Department for Transport (2021) 'Table RAS50001:Contributory factors in reported accidents by severity, Great Britain, 2020' <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-road-accidents-vehicles-and-casualties-tables-for-great-britain#contributory-factors-for-reported-road-accidents-ras50> (Accessed 20 June 2022)

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 wearing dark clothing. You may also be affected by glare from oncoming vehicle headlights. Reducing night time 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 sometimes get affected by dazzle from oncoming vehicle headlights at night. Someone recommended using 'night time driving glasses', is this a good idea?

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.

If I drive with defective eyesight that is below the required minimum legal standard what are the penalties?

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 an accident that hurts yourself or another person. If you cause death by dangerous driving you could face up to 14 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.



accidents don't have to happen

References