



## GERIATRIC OPTOMETRIST

**Health care advances have allowed older people to live longer, more active lives. However, the elderly are increasingly impacted by age-related diseases, including specific ocular conditions that can result in disability and blindness. As individuals grow older, it becomes increasingly important to prioritize their eye care to maintain optimal eye health.**

There is no exact age that defines someone as ‘geriatric,’ but it is generally understood that individuals over 65 are often considered older adults. It’s important to note that geriatrics is not solely defined by age, as some people younger than 65 may require geriatric care due to specific medical conditions or disabilities.

### **About Geriatric Optometry**

Geriatric optometry is a specialized field within optometry that focuses on addressing the eye health and

vision needs of older individuals. Geriatric optometrists conduct comprehensive eye exams specifically designed to identify age-related factors that may lead to vision loss or eye diseases.

In addition to typical optometric practices, geriatric optometrists also assess health and eye problems that are more common in older individuals, such as cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy. Geriatric optometrists may also be involved in low vision rehabilitation, helping patients with vision loss adapt to their limited vision and

maximize their functional abilities. They also refer patients to ophthalmologists for glaucoma or cataract surgery, retina detachment repair, and help co-manage conditions related to systemic disease.

Beyond addressing eye conditions, geriatric optometrists also evaluate vision for driving, offer guidance on proper nutrition, and implement measures for fall prevention to support the overall well-being of older patients. Geriatric eye examinations also can detect larger health issues such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, and some types of cancer.

Specializing in healthcare for elderly patients requires a specific type of practitioner. Geriatric optometrists possess empathy, patience, and sensitivity to handle challenging cases. Elderly patients often need more than just eyeglasses or contact lenses. Similar to providers for pediatric patients, geriatric optometrists must address other age-related concerns during exams.

## Why choose this path?

*When I first graduated optometry school and became a licensed optometrist, I began my career providing primary vision care, examining, diagnosing and treating vision problems. I soon discovered that there was much more to what I could do in this profession. Although I continued to provide services in my private practice, I also became staff allied physician for several rehabilitation hospitals and clinics, providing evaluation, diagnoses and direct rehabilitative treatment for patients who had suffered traumatic brain injury (head injuries from accidents, concussions, strokes, and other neurological conditions affecting vision).*

*Optometry has allowed me to provide comprehensive vision care for individuals from infancy all the way through those in their senior years. It could be something as straightforward as providing glasses or contacts for a child, by allowing them to see and do well in school or sports or to evaluate, manage and guide patients who have visual impairments that result from diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, or glaucoma. Optometry is a profession that provides so many opportunities to improve quality of life. Make a difference in people's lives by choosing optometry.*

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## Training

Geriatric optometry training involves a blend of foundational optometry education, specialized coursework, and practical experience focused on the unique needs of elderly patients. This includes specific courses on the aging eye, geriatric ocular diseases, and the interplay between systemic health and vision.

Students and residents typically participate in clinical rotations in geriatric optometry settings, gaining practical experience in diagnosing, treating, and managing vision problems in older adults. These residencies can last for one year or longer. The schools and colleges of optometry offer residency programs in many different areas of emphasis. More information about these areas of emphasis can be found on the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry website at <https://optometriceducation.org/current-students/residency-programs/asco-residency-titles-and-descriptions/>

Even after completing training, optometrists can participate in ongoing continuing education programs to stay abreast of the latest advancements in geriatric optometry and best practices for caring for older adults. This can include attending conferences, workshops, and continuing education courses.

## Opportunities

Currently, there is no specific data on the number of geriatric optometrists in the U.S. Nonetheless, there is a rising demand for eye care professionals who comprehend the unique requirements of the aging demographic.

According to the World Health Organization, by 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over. At this time the share of the population aged 60 years and over will increase from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion. By 2050, the world's population of people aged 60 years and older will double (2.1 billion). The number of persons aged 80 years or older is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050 to reach 426 million.



## Resources

There isn't a single, formally recognized "Geriatric Optometry Association" as a distinct organization. However, the following organizations address geriatric optometry through various means:

- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

The AOA has sections and resources dedicated to the care of older adults, including Low Vision and Geriatric Ocular Disease.

- **American Academy of Optometry**  
<https://aaopt.org/membership/sections-special-interest-groups-alt/via-sig/>

The AAO has a special interest group focused on Vision in Aging.

- **American Geriatrics Society (AGS)**  
<https://www.americangeriatrics.org/>

The AGS is another organization that works to improve the health and quality of life for older adults. They also offer resources.