



THE COLLEGE
OF OPTOMETRISTS



Britain's Eye Health in Focus

A snapshot of consumer attitudes and behaviour towards eye health



As the professional body for optometry in the UK, the College plays a key role in shaping the profession and educating the general public about their eye health. This report, commissioned by the College and conducted by YouGov, provides an update to the first Britain's Eye Health in Focus published in June 2011¹ and adds to the existing body of information about how people view their eye health and the role of the optometrist.

The findings from the 2011 report showed that the public value their sight above all other senses. It was encouraging to find a growing understanding of the link between eye health and lifestyle. This update highlights several significant changes since 2011. The number of UK adults that view sight tests as 'very important' has risen from 39% in 2011 to 52% this year. The number of people who would not turn to an optometrist first if they experienced an eye problem has risen from 41% in 2011 to 45% in 2012, highlighting the need to continue to educate people about the important role that optometrists play as part of the public health landscape.

Although it was reassuring to see that people are placing a higher importance on their eye health, it appears there is still some work to be done, especially in at risk groups where regular sight tests are recommended. Five per cent of people aged 40+ said they had not been for a sight test for at least 10 years or could not recall when they last went; and eleven per cent of people from ethnic minorities answered similarly. People fear losing their eyesight but often will not do anything to look after their eyes until they notice a problem², by which point significant damage may have already occurred.

We hope that this report contributes in some way to increasing understanding of the important role an optometrist plays.

Kamlesh Chauhan
President of the College of Optometrists

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Findings at a glance:

- 74% of people in the UK either wear corrective eyewear or have had laser eye surgery to help them see better. More women than men wear corrective eyewear.
- Just over half of the population (52%) view sight tests as 'very important' with women more likely than men to view them that way (59% compared to 45%).
- More than half of UK adults (59%) find it easy to book a sight test.
- The fact that people value their eye health does not mean they are regularly getting their eyes tested. Five per cent of people over 40 said they had not been for a sight test for at least 10 years or could not recall when they last went. This rises to 11% of ethnic minorities questioned, a particular concern as this group is at increased risk of particular eye conditions.
- More work needs to be done to educate people about the role of an optometrist, as half of UK adults (50%) do not know how to tell if an optometrist is qualified.
- Fewer than half of UK adults (45%) would turn to an optometrist in the first instance to find the cause of an eye problem.
- Parents place a higher importance on their children's eye health than their own but a quarter of parents (25%) said their child has never had an eye test and almost one in ten parents either couldn't recall when their child last had a sight test, or said it was more than ten years ago.
- Age related macular degeneration (AMD) remains the least well-known eye condition, with 29% of people saying they had never heard of it. Cataract was the most well-known eye condition with 95% of people having heard of it.
- Almost a third of people (31%) were not aware that glaucoma can run in families, suggesting the need to increase awareness of hereditary eye conditions.
- Although people of African-Caribbean and Asian origin are more likely to develop certain eye conditions, over three quarters (78%) of people from the 'at risk' groups are unaware that they could be at increased risk.
- 40% of people from ethnic backgrounds who hadn't had an eye test in the last two years said it was because they didn't think it was necessary.



Overview of the sector and attitudes towards sight tests

Sector overview

- More women than men wear corrective eyewear
- There has been a rise in the number of people wearing glasses
- Younger people are more likely to wear contact lenses than older people
- More than half of UK adults said they found it easy to book a sight test
- 8% of UK adults said they had not been for a sight test for at least 10 years or could not recall when they last went
- 3% of UK adults have never been for a sight test

"74% of people in the UK either wear corrective eyewear or have had laser eye surgery to help them see better"

The use of corrective eyewear in the UK is very common and has not changed significantly from 2011. Of those needing corrective eyewear, the majority wear it to correct short sight³.



69%
of people in the UK wear glasses



13%
of people in the UK wear contact lenses



72%
of women in the UK wear glasses

16%
of women in the UK wear contact lenses



66%
of men in the UK wear glasses

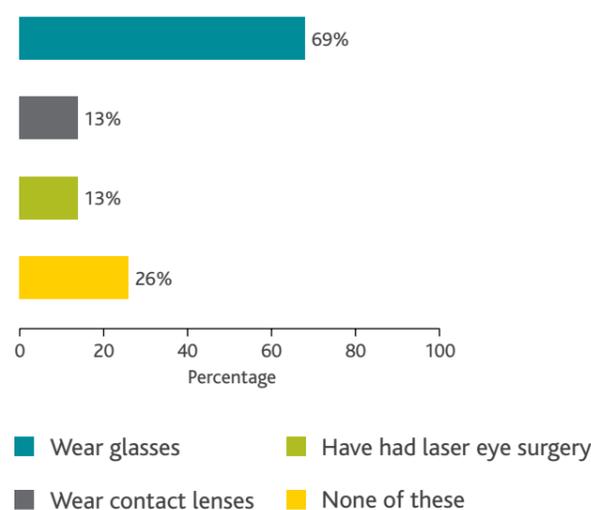
11%
of men in the UK wear contact lenses



8%
of UK adults had not been for a sight test for at least 10 years or could not recall when they last went

There has been a rise in the number of people wearing glasses some or all of the time (up from 62% in 2011 to 69% now). 13% of people say they wear contact lenses, which is similar to the 2011 figure of 14%. 3% of people surveyed have had laser surgery to correct their eyesight. More women than men wear both glasses (72% versus 66%) and contact lenses (16% versus 11%).

Corrective eyewear in the UK

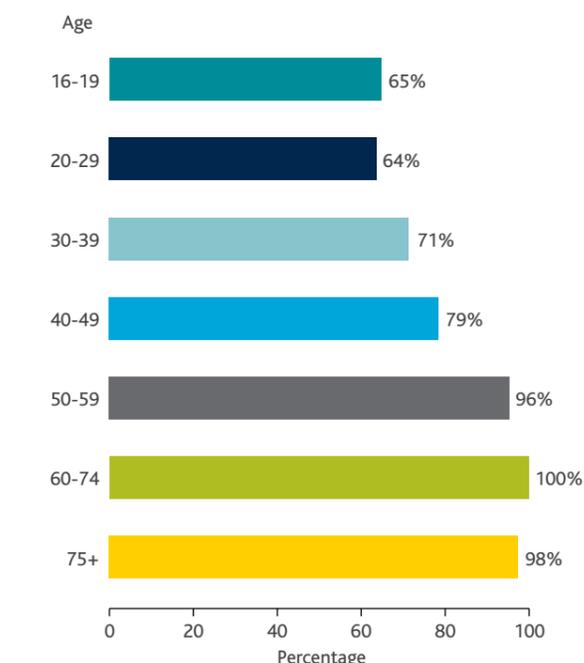


Younger people are much more likely to wear contact lenses than older people. Between 18% and 21% of 16 to 49 year olds wear contact lenses compared to between 2% and 9% of people over 50.

There are fewer differences regionally. The highest group of glasses wearers were those living in the East Midlands (74%) the lowest group were those living in London (66%). For contact lenses, the highest group was those living in the South West (17%); the lowest was those living in West Midlands (11%) and Wales (11%).

Those in the lowest socio-economic group are more likely to wear glasses (80%), than those in mid (65%) or higher (75%) groups. The trend is reversed for contact lenses, with 17% of a higher socio-economic group saying they sometimes/always wear contact lenses, compared to only 8% in the lowest group.

Adults wearing corrective eyewear in the UK



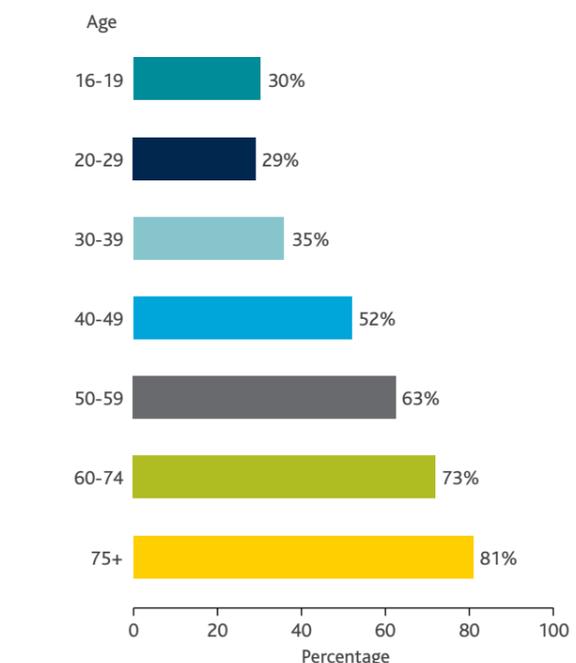
Frequency of and attitudes towards sight tests

The 2011 report showed that 84% of adults value their sight more than any other sense. However this does not necessarily translate into their prioritising sight tests.

"Over half of UK adults viewed sight tests as 'very important'."

When asked to rank on a scale the importance of sight tests, just over half (52%) said they were 'very important'. This is an increase from the 2011 report when 39% of people rated sight tests as 'very important'. However, there were significant age variations within this, with 81% of people 75+ regarding sight tests as 'very important', compared with just 30% of 16-19 year olds.

Adults who value their sight highly



Overall, sight tests were valued as highly as dental checks with almost half (48%) of people considering dental checks 'very important' (compared to 52% for sight tests). Younger people valued sight and dental checks far less highly than older people (65% for those 75+ compared to 27% of 16 to 19 year olds).

People caring for someone over 60 were likely to place even more importance on the value of a sight test. 74% of people caring for someone over 60 valued sight tests as 'very important'. Being mindful of older people's eyesight is important because older people with visual problems are much more likely to fall⁴. Older people with sight loss are also almost three times more likely to experience depression than people with good vision⁵.

"5% of people aged over 40 said they had not been for a sight test for at least 10 years or could not recall when they last went."

When asked when they had last had a sight test, just over half of adults (51%) said it was either within the last six months or the last year. 8% of people said it was not for at least 10 years or they couldn't recall when they'd last been; 3% said they had never been for a sight test. Five per cent of people over 40 said they couldn't recall when they had last been or had never been; this rose to 11% of people from black and minority ethnic groups. It's recommended that both these groups have regular sight tests every two years to ensure any changes in vision or eye health are picked up early.

The main reason that people have not had a sight test in the last two years is because they didn't think it was necessary (45%). Other common reasons were that they were concerned about the cost of new glasses (23%), they didn't have time (19%) or they had concerns about the cost of the test (16%).

"59% of UK adults found it easy to book a sight test."

Booking sight tests does not appear to be a barrier to access. When booking sight tests more than half of UK adults found it easy (59%) and fewer than 1% found it impossible.

People in Northern Ireland rated sight tests more highly than anywhere else in the country (88%). The lowest response was from Wales, with only 61% seeing it as 'very important' and 11% of people from Wales rating sight tests as 'very unimportant'.

Women also place a higher value on sight tests, with 59% of women ranking them 'very important', compared to 45% of men.

Dr Susan Blakeney
Optometric adviser to the College of Optometrists and practising optometrist



"It is encouraging to see that 52% of UK adults view sight tests as 'very important'. The fact that this number has risen from 2011 suggests the work done in the last two years to educate the public on the importance of eye examinations for checking eye health is making a difference.

"However, awareness is highest (81%) amongst the oldest age group (over 75s) and lowest amongst the under 30s, meaning more work may need to be done to reach a younger audience.

"The research also found that 8% of people have not had a sight test in a decade. The earlier a problem is detected the greater the chance of successful treatment. Some very serious eye conditions do not have painful symptoms, therefore it is particularly important to go for regular checkups. Adults over 40 and those from black, asian and minority ethnic backgrounds should go for a check-up every two years, unless otherwise advised by an optometrist. I also tell my patients to be aware of what is 'normal' vision for them, and to seek advice if they notice any changes. This will help ensure any changes in vision or eye health are picked up early."

- Half of UK adults did not know how to tell if an optometrist was qualified
- Fewer than half of UK adults would turn to an optometrist first to find the cause of an eye problem
- Women were more likely than men to first turn to an optometrist to find the cause of an eye problem

Role of optometrists

"Half of UK adults do not know how to tell if an optometrist is qualified."

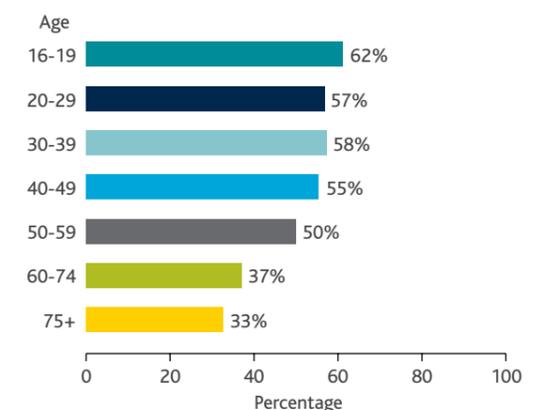
Optometrists are highly trained healthcare professionals who are qualified to examine eyes, recognise disease and prescribe and fit glasses and contact lenses. The General Optical Council (GOC) is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK and is responsible for promoting high standards of education, performance and conduct amongst opticians. All optometrists practising in the UK must be registered with the GOC and are listed on the Opticians' Register.

Half of the people surveyed (50%) did not know how to tell if an optometrist was qualified. Of those who did, just over a third (35%) said they would look them up on a register such as the General Optical Council, while a quarter (26%) said they would look for the letters MCOptom or FCOptom – letters that signify an optometrist is a member or fellow of the College and is committed to the College's clinical and ethical standards – and 10% would look for a degree qualification. Younger people were less likely to know how to tell if an optometrist was qualified, with 62% of 16-19 year olds saying they didn't know versus 33% of 75+ year olds. Men were also less likely to know how to tell if an optometrist was qualified than women, with 53% saying they didn't know, compared to 47% of women.

When asked what an optometrist does during an eye examination the most common answer was 'looking to see if your eyes were healthy', cited by more than three quarters (78%) of people. The next most common answers were testing how well you can see (76%) and giving advice on eye health (69%). 65% of people said an optometrist would write a prescription for glasses or contact lenses; only 27% said they expected to be sold glasses and contact lenses.

In response to these findings, the College of Optometrists launched the campaign 'Look for the Letters' in September 2012 to encourage the public to look for the letters MCOptom or FCOptom after an optometrist's name.

Percentage of people that did not know how to tell if an optometrist was qualified





06 Children's eye health

Key findings

- Parents are more likely to place a higher value on their children's eye sight than they do their own
- A quarter of parents have never taken their child for a sight test
- People in Wales were most likely to rate sight tests for children as 'very important'
- Parents believed 16% of children had sight tests at school

Where people go for information

"Three quarters of people would turn to an optometrist for information."

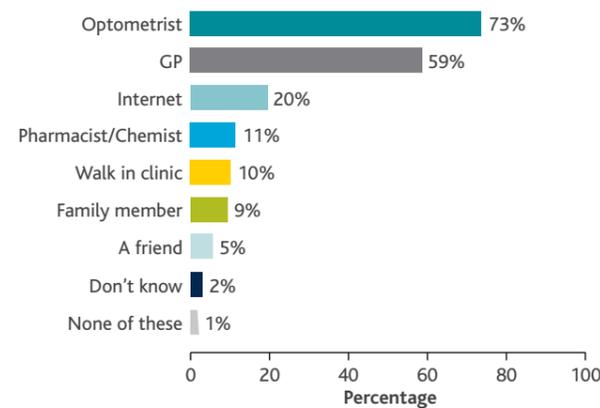
Fewer than half (45%) of UK adults would turn to an optometrist first to find the cause of an eye problem; this figure is significantly lower than the 2011 figure of 59%. 30% would go to their GP first and 11% would go straight to the internet.

Women (48%) were more likely than men (42%) to first turn to an optometrist if they had an issue with their eyes. Older people were much more likely to first turn to an optometrist than younger people; with 53% of over 75s saying they would, compared to 32% of 16-19 year olds.

When asked more generally where they would go for information about eye health, optometrists ranked highly amongst people surveyed, with three quarters (73%) saying they would go to an optometrist for information, compared with 59% turning to a GP, 20% the internet and 11% a pharmacy. When asked for further detail about how they would find information on the internet, the most common responses were through searching for symptoms on Google, looking on trusted websites such as NHS Direct or patient.co.uk, or well-known high street optical brands.

However, when it comes to seeking treatment, optometrists rated higher. 61% of people said they were 'very likely' to go to an optometrist, with 52% saying they were 'very likely' to visit their GP. These two options far outranked other options such as a friend, the internet, pharmacists and walk-in clinics.

Where would you turn if you had an eye problem



Sanjay Patel
Optometrist and Specsavers
joint venture partner



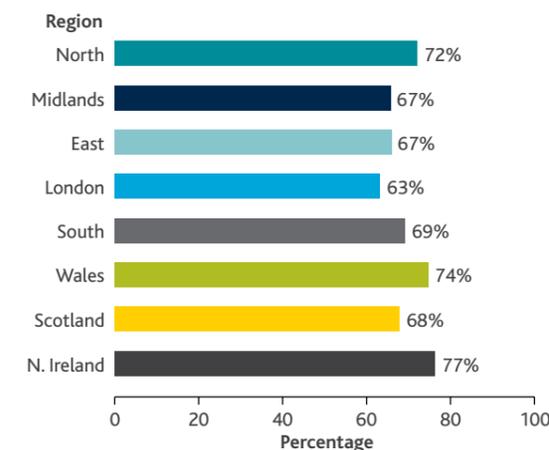
"It is worrying to see that less than half of adults would see an optometrist as their first port of call if they had an eye problem. This indicates that more needs to be done to help people to understand the role we play as eye health professionals and the skills and expertise we can provide.

"The 'Look for the Letters' campaign aims to encourage people to choose an optometrist with the letters MCOptom or FCOptom after their name. The letters signify that an optometrist is a member or fellow of the College of Optometrists – both of which demonstrate a commitment to the College's clinical and ethical standards.

"When people understand that optometrists are highly trained eye care professionals, they are more likely to turn to them first when they suspect an issue with their eye health."

Parents are more likely to place a higher value on their children's eye sight than they do their own, with 70% rating sight tests for their children as 'very important'. Parents place a slightly higher value on dental checks for their children, with 74% of them rating children's dental checks as 'very important'. This suggests more work may need to be done to ensure parents regularly consider their children's eye health in the same way they regard their dental health.

People that consider children's sight tests 'very important'

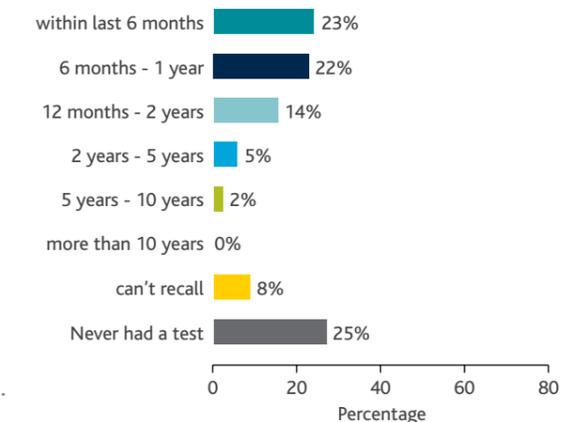


"A quarter of parents have never taken their children for a sight test."

Although 70% of parents say they see sight tests as 'very important' for their children's health, a quarter of parents (25%) said their child has never had an eye test. This is much higher than the 2011 figure of 14%.

Overall, nearly a quarter of parents have taken their children for a sight test within the last six months and 22% of parents have taken their children within the last year. One in ten parents either couldn't recall when their child last had a sight test, or said it was more than ten years ago.

Frequency of children's eye test





- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) remains the least recognised hereditary eye condition when comparing awareness of AMD, glaucoma and cataract
- Awareness of eye conditions was generally higher amongst the older age groups
- Almost a third of people were not aware that glaucoma, a complicated disease in which damage to the optic nerve leads to progressive, irreversible vision loss and which is the second leading cause of blindness, may run in families
- More women than men were aware that glaucoma may run in families

When questioned 16% of parents believed that the last sight test that their child had was conducted at their school. Sight tests are not formally provided in schools, although the NHS Constitution recommends children be screened for visual problems in their first year of school. However, provision is patchy, particularly outside state schools and for children with learning difficulties, who are ten times more likely to have problems with their sight. Screening is important as it can help identify conditions which may be hard to treat if not picked up at an early age. In 2011 a Which? survey showed that one in five primary care trusts is not offering sight screenings in schools⁶. The same research suggests that between 10-20% of children are likely to have a significant eye problem which can be detected by screening.

Kathryn Saunders
Reader in vision science and head of subject in optometry at the University of Ulster



"Implementing an effective screening programme for children in their first year of school is important as undiagnosed sight problems can hold back children's educational and personal development. However, it is not clear whether parents understand the difference between an eye examination and school vision screening. Screening is designed to pick up some potential eye problems at an early stage, but it isn't the same as a full eye examination. If you think your child might have other problems with their vision then you should take them for a full sight test, which is free on the NHS."

Just over a third of people (35%) strongly agree that you can have an eye problem without symptoms. This awareness is highest amongst 60-74 year olds (47% strongly agree); awareness is predictably lowest amongst 16-19 year olds (17% strongly agree).

AMD

"AMD remains the least well-known hereditary condition."

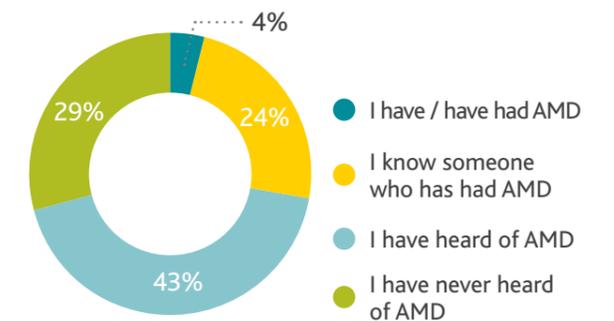
Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of vision loss for people over the age of 50 in the western world. Risk increases with advancing age and is more common in those with a family history of AMD. However, it is generally less well known than other common eye conditions, such as cataract and glaucoma.

Yet in the survey 71% of people said they have either had it, have heard of it or know someone who has had it. This figure is significantly higher than 2011 when only 51% of people had heard of AMD.

Awareness of AMD was generally higher amongst the older age groups. 91% of over 75s had heard of AMD, whereas awareness amongst 16-19 year-olds was far lower, with only 42% of this group having heard of the condition.

In terms of regional differences, people were least likely to have heard of AMD in Scotland, with 65% saying they had heard of it; people in Northern Ireland were most likely to have heard of it (76%).

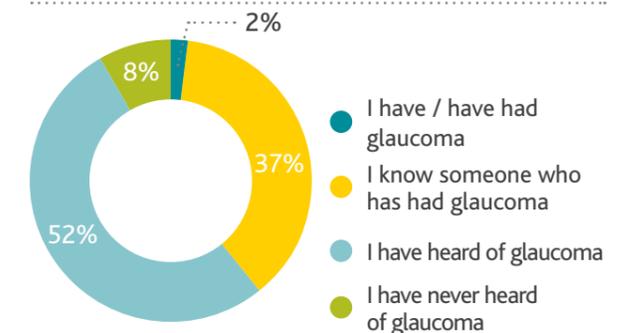
Awareness of AMD



Glaucoma

"Men were less likely than women to know that glaucoma can be hereditary."

Awareness of glaucoma



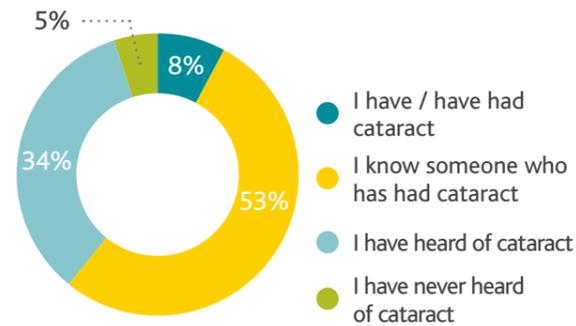
Glaucoma is a serious disease that affects 480,000 people in England and can run in families but almost a third of people (31%) were not aware of this. From this group, 60-74 year olds were most likely to be aware that glaucoma has a hereditary link (just 20% said they didn't know), with 16-19 year olds least likely to be aware (62% said they didn't know).

Women were more likely than men to know that glaucoma can be hereditary, with 76% of women saying they were aware of this, compared to 63% of men saying they knew. People in the London region were least likely to know that glaucoma can run in families with 38% of people saying they didn't know, versus people in Wales at the other end of the scale with only 21% of people saying they didn't know.

Cataract

"95% of people had heard of cataract."

Awareness of cataract



Cataract can form at any age, but most often are a natural consequence of getting older. The majority of people aged over 65 have some cataract development and most cases can be treated successfully with surgery.

Overall, 95% of people had either had, known someone who has had, or heard of cataract. Just over half of UK adults (53%) know of someone who has had cataract.

The group least aware of cataract was 16-19 year olds with 15% of them saying they had never heard of the condition, compared to only 1% of those over 75.

Of those questioned women were more likely than men to have cataract (10% versus 6%). Those in London (10%) and Wales (10%) were most likely to have had cataract and those in Northern Ireland (5%) were least likely, according to the survey.

Johnathan Waugh
Hospital optometrist



"The 2012 results follow the last report's findings that AMD remains one of the least well known hereditary conditions. AMD is the leading cause of blindness amongst the elderly in the western world. An estimated 30% of people aged 75 years or older show at least the early manifestations of AMD. Children and young people may also suffer from an inherited form of macular degeneration called macular dystrophy. Sometimes several members of a family will suffer from this condition and, if this is the case, it is very important that their eyes are checked regularly. As AMD is the least well-known hereditary condition, we need to do more to increase understanding.

"Cataract and glaucoma remain the most commonly known eye conditions; a condition such as cataract is generally seen as part of the natural ageing process and is more commonly spoken about. Generally awareness of potentially hereditary conditions is higher amongst women than men.

"Sight loss impacts significantly on the daily lives of 1.86 million people in the UK, and that figure is set to increase dramatically as the population ages. We recommend that people over 40, people from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and those with a history of eye problems in the family have an eye examination at least every two years, but if you notice changes in your eyesight, it is advisable to visit your optometrist as soon as possible."

08 Ethnicity and eye health

Key findings

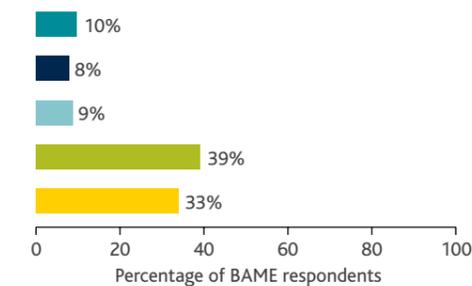
- Almost three quarters of African-Caribbean and South Asian people are still unaware that they are more susceptible to a condition such as glaucoma than the rest of the population
- Over a quarter of the ethnic groups surveyed said they had been for a sight test in the last six months
- 40% of people from BAME groups said they hadn't had a sight test in the last two years because they didn't think it was necessary

Awareness

"Almost three quarters of people from 'at risk' groups did not realise they are at increased risk of developing certain eye conditions such as glaucoma."

Evidence shows us that people of African-Caribbean origin are at an increased risk of developing glaucoma, while people of South Asian origin are at an increased risk of diabetes and the associated eye condition, diabetic retinopathy, as well as early onset cataract, yet awareness of this is alarmingly low.

Do people from BAME groups know they are at risk?



- Yes, I regularly monitor my eyes because of this
- Yes, but I don't know what to do about it
- Yes, but I'm not worried about it
- No, I'm not at any more risk than anyone else
- Not sure

Almost three quarters (72%) of people from BAME groups either did not think or did not know they were at increased risk of developing certain eye diseases like glaucoma (39% said they didn't think they were at increased risk and 33% did not know).

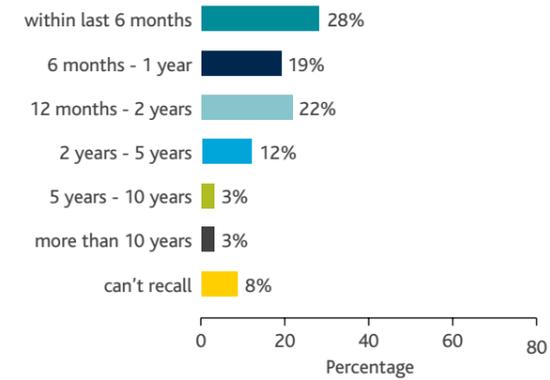
Although those of African-Caribbean and South Asian origin are more susceptible to glaucoma than other ethnic groups. Over a third (37%) of people in both groups, African-Caribbean (36%) and South Asian (38%), are unaware that they are at a higher risk.

Sight tests

People from BAME groups believe sight tests are more important than dental check-ups: 56% rated sight tests as 'very important' and 47% rating dental checks 'very important'. As far as their children are concerned, the ratings were the same – 72% rated both dental and sight tests as 'very important', similar to the main population sample.

28% of African-Caribbean and South Asian people surveyed said they had been for a sight test in the last six months; 19% said they had been within the last year. This is slightly lower than the general population. 40% of people from BAME groups who hadn't had a sight test in the last two years said this was because they didn't think sight tests were necessary.

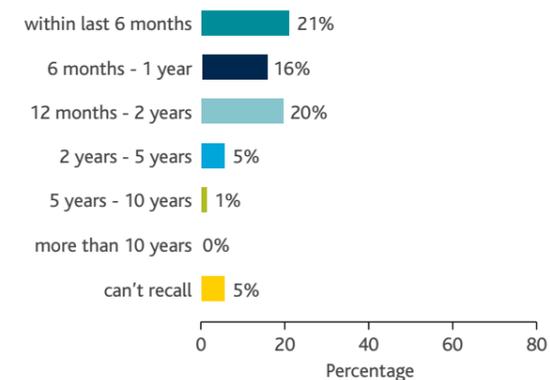
Frequency of eye tests for people from BAME groups



Children

Parents from ethnic backgrounds are less likely to have ever taken their children for a sight test -30% compared to 25% of the general population.

Frequency of eye tests for children from BAME groups



Knowledge of eye conditions, including hereditary conditions

39% of the BAME population surveyed don't think they are at higher risk of certain eye diseases due to their ethnic origin but only 10% of people surveyed regularly monitor their eyes.

Knowledge about common eye conditions is lower among minority ethnic groups than the general population. 38% have not heard of AMD (versus 29% general population), 23% have not heard of lazy eye (versus 10% general population), 17% have not heard of glaucoma (versus 8% general population) and 11% have not heard of cataract (versus 5% general population).



Only 38% of BAME groups believe that glaucoma can run in families – far lower than 58% of the general population.

Those of African-Caribbean descent are significantly more likely than those of Asian descent to know someone who has glaucoma (37% compared to 28%).

In fact, people of African-Caribbean descent are up to eight times more likely to develop the most common type of glaucoma, primary open glaucoma. Glaucoma also occurs in people of African-Caribbean origin ten to fifteen years earlier than in other ethnic groups⁷.



39% of BAME population don't think they are at higher risk of certain eye diseases



only 38% of BAME groups believe that glaucoma can run in families

Shamina Asif
Optometrist, Boots Opticians



"Although evidence has shown that people of African-Caribbean and Asian origin are more likely to develop certain eye conditions than white people, there is still a big awareness issue with almost three quarters (72%) of people from the 'at risk' groups being unaware that they could be more susceptible to these conditions.

"Research indicates that people of South Asian and East Asian origin are not only more likely to develop glaucoma, but are more likely to develop a rarer form; primary angle closure glaucoma^{8,9}.

"The more common primary open glaucoma occurs very slowly, which means there can be no noticeable symptoms until significant vision damage has occurred – the peripheral vision gradually starts to deteriorate, working towards the centre of vision. It is therefore especially important that those in at risk groups go for regular sight tests to aid detection and treatment."



Method

This report summarises a survey called 'Britain's Eye Health in Focus 2012'. The survey was conducted by YouGov and looked at consumer attitudes and behaviour in relation to eye health.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 4,032 nationally representative UK adults. We also surveyed an additional 320 adults in the most at risk BAME groups – people of African-Caribbean and South Asian origins. Fieldwork was undertaken between the 31 July and 5 August 2012 and the survey was carried out online. The main figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 16+).

About the College of Optometrists

The College of Optometrists is the professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the UK, working for public benefit. Supporting its members in all aspects of professional development, the College provides pre-registration training and assessment, continuous professional development opportunities, and advice and guidance on professional conduct and standards, enabling members to serve their patients well and contribute to the wellbeing of local communities.

About optometrists

Previously known as ophthalmic opticians, optometrists are trained professionals who examine eyes, test sight, give advice on visual problems and prescribe and dispense spectacles or contact lenses. They also recommend other treatments or visual aids where appropriate. Optometrists are trained to recognise eye diseases, referring such cases as necessary, and can also use or supply various eye drugs.

Optometrists study at university for at least three years and participate in a full year of training and supervision, called the pre-registration period, before qualifying. Once qualified, they have the opportunity to develop their interests in specialist aspects of practice such as contact lenses, treating eye diseases, low vision, children's vision and sports vision.

All optometrists practising in the UK must be registered with the General Optical Council, the profession's regulatory body, and are listed in the Opticians' Register. The letters FCOptom or MCOptom after an optometrist's name means that he or she is a fellow or member of the College of Optometrists. Optometrists have the opportunity to study for higher qualifications in a number of specialist areas. The College's higher qualifications are designed to give commissioners proof that an optometrist has the knowledge and skills to offer enhanced services.

There are currently more than 11,500 registered optometrists in the UK.

References

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For more information

Visit www.lookafteryoureyes.org for information on how to keep your eyes healthy and to find your nearest optometrist.

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