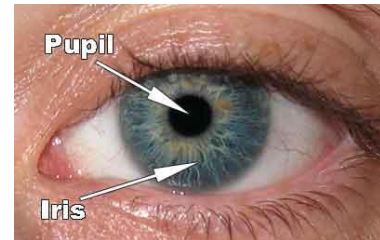


PUPIL DILATION

Q What do my pupils do?

The pupils of the eyes are simply holes in the center of the iris (the colored part of the eye) that allow light to reach the back of the eye and form an image. Pupil size changes in response to changes in light intensity – the brighter the light, the smaller your pupils become. When the light is dimmed, the pupils dilate again to allow more light to enter the eye. Muscles in the iris, which enlarge or constrict the pupil, control this function. The process adjusts the amount of light that enters the eye so that the optimum amount for clear vision focused onto the retina at the back of the eye.



The pupils also get smaller when we look at something close and bigger when we are excited, in pain or frightened. Even though it is dark when we sleep, the pupils become small because the muscles that control pupil size are at rest.

In Most people the pupil size is equal in the two eyes at any given time and remains so even if one eye is kept in darkness and the other is exposed to light.

Q Why does my optometrist use drops that make my pupils larger?

As part of your eye examination your optometrist looks through your pupils to inspect the inside of the eye. In particular, the back of the eye is inspected because it contains the most sensitive part of the retina and the optic nerve that carries the visual picture to the brain.

The instrument used for this examination is called an ophthalmoscope. There are several kinds of ophthalmoscopes but all utilize a bright light. This bright light would normally make the pupil very small and restrict the optometrist's view of the inside of the eye. This would be like looking through a keyhole in a door to examine with a small torch beam the inside of a dark room.



To overcome this problem and allow a thorough assessment of the interior of the eye, your optometrist may need to make the pupils larger. Pupil dilation will allow an examination of the more peripheral parts of the eye or a particular feature under high magnification. This is achieved by placing drops in the eye, which will alter the muscle balance controlling the pupil size and allow the muscles that make the pupil larger to take effect.

Q What will I experience?

The drops act gradually to dilate the pupils over about 20 minutes. You may notice Difficulty in focusing on near objects such as books and some people notice that their distance vision is also blurred. You may also be more sensitive to bright lights and glare. These effects are harmless and largely wear off within about



one hour. Many people, particularly the elderly, may experience no change at all in their vision.

If you have an allergy to the active ingredient or to the preservatives used in the drops, your eyes may become itchy and red. This is rare and unlikely to be severe, and is easily treated. If you have had an allergic reaction to drops you have used in the past, tell your optometrist so precautions can be taken to minimize any side effects.

Q Are there practical measures I can take following dilation?

Yes. Because the larger than normal pupils are letting more light into your eye, glare may be an inconvenience for a short time. You should take a pair of sunglasses with you when you attend your optometrist, in case glary conditions make you particularly uncomfortable. Alternatively, a short spell in the waiting room, will allow your vision to return to normal.



If your vision blurred when your eye examination is completed, you should be careful walking, particularly when stepping off footpaths or crossing roads. Elderly people may need to wait for half an hour or so in the waiting room until their vision returns to normal, or arrange someone to escort them home.

It is important that you wait for your vision to return to normal if you intend to drive or use machinery. You may wish to arrange for someone to drive you to your home or workplace immediately after the examination.

Q What are the advantages of dilation?

Any slight inconvenience caused by an eye examination in which pupil-dilating drops are used is more than offset by the knowledge that you have had a thorough check of the health of your eyes. This type of examination is particularly important for people who have diabetes or other general disease conditions.

If you have any concerns about your eyes following an examination, contact your optometrist for advice.