



Glare on the roads: Are we being driven to distraction?

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Optometrist Geoff Roberson, from the Association of Optometrists (AOP), comments that the growing popularity of vehicles with high intensity headlights – which can be up to three times brighter than conventional headlights – could lead to increasing problems for drivers.

A number of motor vehicles now have High Intensity Discharge (HID), or bi-xenon headlights, which are significantly brighter and can cause increased headlight glare for other drivers.

Geoff Roberson, Professional Adviser at the AOP, said: “It’s a balancing act around light contrast. Ironically, what is good for the driver who has HID headlights - better illumination of the road ahead - is not so good for other road users because of increased glare problems. A driver who is dazzled by HID headlights may be distracted, experience discomfort and not see as well. The increased glare means that drivers may find it more difficult to see pedestrians and cyclists on the road.”

Mr Roberson continued: “HID headlights could be a particular problem in rural areas, where there is reduced street lighting and therefore less contrast on the road. In this particular scenario, the problem of glare is at its most troublesome.”

“This is an added problem for older people whose eyes don’t work as efficiently. Older age groups could suffer more from glare with their vision becoming increasingly misty. This is due to the way our eyes change with age - resulting in a loss of transparency in the lens - so not as much light gets through to the retina at the back of the eye. This means that the light going in to the eye is not as clean and crisp with some scattered randomly, rather than focused precisely. This results in increasingly misty vision. Add to this the issue of discomfort caused by HID glare in a rural area and this does give cause for concern.”

Anyone who is concerned about their eyesight should have it checked by an optometrist. Mr Roberson added: “Everyone should have a regular eye examination – we recommend every two years for most people. It’s not just to make sure you can see, but also to pick up other general problems, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Drivers should also make sure that their lenses and spectacles are clean and perhaps consider a coating to reduce reflections.”

Ends

For more information, please contact Anne Grenyer, AOP PR Manager, annegrenyer@aop.org.uk or 020 7401 5316.

Notes to Editors

The Association of Optometrists

Formed in 1946, the Association of Optometrists (AOP) represents individual optometrists in

negotiations with government and other organisations. It also promotes the profession and development of high professional and clinical standards. Find out more: www.aop.org.uk

Geoff Roberson, Professional Adviser at the Association of Optometrists

Geoff Roberson is an optometrist and worked in private practice for more than 13 years before becoming Director of the Institute of Optometry. Since leaving the Institute, Geoff has combined part-time community practice with pre and post registration training, other professional consultancies, expert witness and professional adviser roles, as well as Acting Chief Executive of the College of Optometrists. Geoff has considerable experience as an expert witness and as Professional Adviser in court actions as well as NHS and GOC disciplinary processes. As the AOP's Professional Adviser, Geoff's work includes taking a lead on primary care matters and giving support and guidance to Local Optical Committees. Geoff is also Training Adviser to the Directorate of Optometric Continuing Education and Training (CET) and writes and lectures on a wide variety of optometric topics.

Optical Confederation - The voice of UK optics

The Optical Confederation – The voice of UK optics was launched in April 2010 to bring together the voices of the five representative bodies within the optical profession to speak with a united voice for patients, professionals and the sector. The Confederation is committed to greater cohesion for the five optical bodies: the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO); The Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers (ACLM); the Association of Optometrists (AOP); the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians (FMO) and the Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians (FODO).

Driving and eyesight

The optical sector is currently calling for a review of the current checks on drivers' eyesight. Good vision is crucial not only for safe driving but also to ensure that drivers are not putting themselves and others at risk unnecessarily. As changes in eyesight can occur gradually over time, it may not be immediately noticeable that there is a problem. We are concerned that many drivers are failing to look after their eyesight and are also unaware of their responsibility to report problems with their vision to the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA). We are also concerned that the number plate test is not an appropriate assessment of drivers' vision. We believe the current system is therefore inadequate. Find out more:

<http://www.eyehhealthalliance.co.uk/campaigns/>

Optical terms

What is an optometrist?

Optometrists test sight and prescribe and dispense spectacles and contact lenses. They are university and post-graduate trained to recognise disease and abnormality in the eye.

Optometrists are regulated by the General Optical Council (GOC) to ensure patient safety and high standards of patient care.

Eye care is currently delivered by some 15,000 optometrists and dispensing opticians operating in over 7,000 practices ranging from major high street companies to smaller independent providers, as well as in-hospital eye departments. Optometrists are eye health professionals and the services they provide are far wider than a simple test to determine whether spectacles or contact lenses are required to correct vision. An eye test is not just about getting a pair of glasses – it is a vital health check for your eyes.

A sight test includes (by regulation) a number of other health tests. Many conditions can be detected: glaucoma, cataract, diabetes, age-related macular degeneration (the commonest

cause of blindness in the UK), some forms of cancer, as well as some conditions not usually associated with eyes, such as high blood pressure and brain tumours.

Is an optometrist the same as an optician?

The term 'optometrist' came into use in 1987 to replace 'ophthalmic optician' in the same way that 'pharmacist' replaced 'chemist'. An optician can be ophthalmic, dispensing or manufacturing; it is the optometrist who is qualified to test your eyes. Some dispensing opticians have extra qualifications that enable them to fit contact lenses and carry out certain clinical tests.

Eye facts and figures

1. **100 people start to lose their sight in the UK every day**, half of which could have been prevented through regular sight testing and early treatment¹.
2. Up to **1 million children in the UK** currently have an undetected vision problem².
3. Over 90% of children visit a dentist regularly³, whilst only **53%** of children have ever had an eye examination⁴.
4. In the UK there are currently around **2 million people with sight loss**. It is predicted that by 2050 the numbers of people with sight loss in the UK will double to nearly 4 million⁵.
5. Sight loss is expensive - in 2008 an estimated **£22 billion** was associated with it - in treatment-related costs, indirect costs such as informal care, and 'quality of life' costs such as financial hardship and depression⁶.
6. Department of Health figures show that over **4 million** older people do not have regular eye tests, so their potential sight problems are not being identified or treated.

1. RNIB <http://www.rnib.org.uk/ABOUTUS/ABOUTSIGHTLOSS/Pages/aboutsightloss.aspx> (figures accessed 2010).

2. Statistics provided by the Eyecare Trust and based on DCSF 2009 School Census 0-12 year olds.

3. IPSOS report 'Healthy Sight' commissioned by Transitions Optical (2009).

4. Johnson and Johnson Vision Care Survey (2009).

5. 'Future sight loss UK: The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK adult population' and RNIB 'GPs and Optometrists: attitudes to eye health' (2010).
http://www.rnib.org.uk/aboutus/Research/reports/eyehealth/Pages/eye_health.aspx

6. 'Future sight loss UK: The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK adult population' and RNIB 'GPs and Optometrists: attitudes to eye health' (2010).
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