

Myths about optometrists and spectacles

“There is no point in having my eyes tested as my optometrist can’t do any more for me.”

“My optometrist won’t give me any more glasses.”

“My optometrist says I have got the strongest glasses there are.”

“My optometrist has just given me new glasses but they are no good.”

As optometrists a great deal of our time is taken carrying out eye examinations for visually impaired people as well as for those with normal vision. A major part of this is checking the health of the eyes. We also check the vision and find out whether a change in prescription is necessary in order to focus the image at the back of the eyes. How clearly this focussed image is seen will depend on the health of the eyes and visual system.

For any particular working distance there is only one power of spectacles that will focus. Glasses stronger or weaker than this will make the image less clear. If the object is held much closer to the

eyes than normal, stronger lenses can be used to focus and the print will be magnified. However, often the patient feels that this closer working distance is too uncomfortable to be of practical use. In this case the optometrist will probably advise that he/she can not give stronger glasses.

It is often believed that spectacles should only be changed if a significant improvement in vision will be achieved, and in the majority of cases this is indeed the main reason. As optometrists we are often reluctant to suggest change for any other reason, as we are anxious not to risk being accused of prescribing glasses that may be seen as unnecessary. For this reason we may say spectacles do not need to be changed as this would not make any significant improvement. Visually impaired people sometimes take this to mean that their eyes are beyond help and that there is no point in their coming for eye examinations any more. This certainly is not the case. Regular eye examinations are necessary for everyone, to check the health of the eyes and to review the help that can be given with spectacles.

Magnifiers often work much better with the correct spectacles. Stand magnifiers, (the type that is rested on the print,) may be out of focus and of no

use unless used with the correct reading glasses. This is another reason for updating the spectacles. However optometrists are often reluctant to suggest this, as the benefit may not be immediately evident to a visually impaired person or carer.

One obvious reason for changing spectacles is all too often ignored. Most visually impaired people use glasses. Many wear them all the time, even if they feel they do not significantly improve their vision. There are many reasons for this. They may have worn glasses for many years and feel undressed without them, or perhaps they benefit from tinted lenses. Some people wear spectacles to protect their eyes and many feel that even a small improvement in vision is helpful. Following eye examinations over the years they may regularly be told that new glasses will not improve their vision, so never feel it is necessary to change them. However visually impaired people want to look as good in their glasses as everyone else, and replacing old, (often very old,) spectacles with new and more fashionable ones is an excellent reason for having new glasses. Visually impaired people themselves are often unaware of the poor condition of their present glasses. Friends, relations and carers, as well as optometrists, are often unwilling

to suggest spending money on new spectacles that may not improve vision.

It is extremely important for visually impaired people to make sure they know exactly why the optometrist is, (or isn't,) advising new spectacles. In this way they will avoid being disappointed with the result or feeling that they have been prescribed unnecessary glasses. The optometrist will be happy to demonstrate any improvement he/she feels is possible and the help of trusted friends and family is helpful when choosing new frames.

Finally please remember that regular eye examinations are just as important for those registered blind or partially sighted as they are for anyone else. Visiting the optometrist every couple of years, (or sooner if advised,) is certainly not a waste of their own or their optometrist's time.