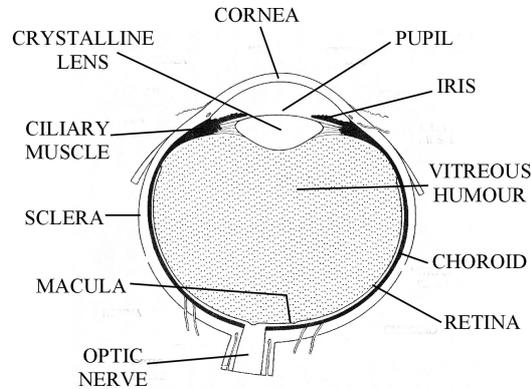


driving



Driving is a highly complex task. The co-ordination between the eyes, the ears, the hands and the feet, together with the necessary knowledge of what to do and when, requires a high degree of skill and concentration. Unfortunately, with experience many drivers become complacent and take good vision for granted.

How Important is Good Eyesight When Driving?

Good eyesight is critically important. Over 90% of the information upon which the brain has to react comes through the eyes, so if there is anything hindering the eyesight - an uncorrected prescription, double vision, or cataract, for example - the driving ability will be impaired.

What is the Required Standard?

The legal standard as defined in the Road Traffic Act 1995 (Revised 2004): “A licence holder or applicant is suffering a **prescribed disability** if unable to meet the eyesight requirements, i.e. to read in good light (with the aid of glasses or contact lenses if worn) a registration mark fixed to a motor vehicle and containing letters and figures 79 millimetres high and 57 millimetres wide (i.e. pre 2001 font) at a distance of 20.5 metres or at a distance of 20 metres where the characters are 50 millimetres wide (i.e. post 2001 font). If unable to meet this standard, the driver must not drive and the licence must be refused or revoked.”

Recent surveys have shown that up to ten percent of drivers - that is, up to three and a half *million* people – regularly drive with eyesight which is below this legal limit.

Is There Any Link Between Poor Eyesight and Traffic Accidents?

Incredibly there has been little research into any link between poor eyesight and accidents, but it is impossible not to reach the conclusion that poor eyesight *must* be a factor in many accidents. How often do we hear a driver say “I never saw him”? Various studies have shown that up to 98% of accidents are caused by driver error, with only the other 2% due to mechanical failure.

Does the Vision Deteriorate With Age?

Yes. With age, the eyes lose their sensitivity to light and to contrast, and the lens within the eye can go a muddy brown colour. The spectacle prescription can also change quite quickly between the ages of 45 and 60. Conditions such as cataract and glaucoma can also reduce the vision.

Isn't it Enough for Drivers to Test Themselves?

No. Eyesight changes usually occur a period of time, and very often go unnoticed by the person as the brain compensates for them.

How Often is it Recommended for Drivers to have Their Sight Tested?

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) recommends that drivers should have at least a sight screening every three years. Vision screening is quicker and cheaper than a full eye examination, and can be performed by anyone who has been suitably trained with inexpensive equipment. Patients who regularly attend for eye examinations should follow the recommendations given by their optometrist.

Remember - by law, every vehicle over three years old has to pass the MOT test every year, so it stands to reason that drivers' eyesight should also be checked regularly, especially since fewer than 2 percent of road accidents are caused by mechanical failure.

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