# Podcast 2: Questions to Ask at the Eye Exam Transcript

Introduction: This podcast is brought to you by the RNIB Older People and Complex Needs Team and is one of our supporting seniors series. It is for people who are supporting an older person or senior and it's also useful for seniors themselves. The information in this podcast will also be useful for people living with dementia, stroke survivors and older adults with learning disabilities.

Marion: I'm Marion MacMillan at RNIB. I’m here with Iain Kennedy and June Neil from the Older People and Complex Needs Team, sharing their advice about how to get the most out of an appointment with your local high street eye specialist. You might know them as your optician or your optometrist.

June: Thanks Marion. Really, we want everyone who attends an eye health check to come away feeling confident and fully understanding any of the information received back to you. It can be stressful going for an eye examination, especially if you’re living with dementia or a stroke survivor or have other complex needs. So I think we should mention that you can get a domiciliary visit, that is when the optometrist comes to your own home and carries out an eye examination there. And that can reduce some of the stressful elements. You can be eligible for that if you have a mobility problem or another health issue. So that could be an option.

The other thing at the appointment there’s lots of information to take in. It can be stressful, as I said before, and also, you’re probably thinking about what glasses are you going to choose. So sometimes you might find you came out of the appointment and thought, oh, I wish I’d asked that question or I wish I'd told the optometrist about this. So hopefully with some of the tips we are sharing today, that you will feel a bit more confident.

Marion: That sounds good. I get nervous when I go to any kind of clinical appointment and even if I’ve got questions beforehand, they tend to just disappear once I'm in there, and I just want straight out the door.

June: A list of questions can be helpful, and I think it’s a good idea to take along a pad and a pen and a list of questions so that you are able to refer back to them throughout the appointment, no matter how nervous you are.

Marion: A list of questions does sound good. What sort of questions would you suggest that people might find useful to ask?

Iain: I think a really good place to start off is are there any eye conditions or significant eye health issues that have been found. If an eye condition has been found, what affect is it going to have on my vision?

So if a cataract for example, has been found, is there any particular lighting, environments that I should change or bright lights, dimmer lights or should I look at larger print sizes and things like that. So what are your take-home messages if anything has been found?

June: Yes, I think it’s really important to ask the optometrist, how can you make the most of your vision and how do you reduce the impact of sight loss? So asking about task lighting can be really useful or as Iain was talking about, like a cataract, it might be just having a chat about wearing sunglasses outside or skip caps just to reduce the effects of glare that might arise from a cataract.

Iain: I think also things like tabletop activities and what is your best working distance is really important. Your eyes may not work as well close up, but they're better for the distance and having an understanding of that, asking those questions of the optician is really, really helpful.

June: And I think that’s important if you’re supporting someone with learning disabilities who maybe likes to do jigsaws or craftwork. Again, just knowing what’s the best working distance at the table so you can setup these activities to make the most out of them.

Iain: Another one is if anything has been found as part of the eye examination, is there any need for onward referral or is it all contained within the optician’s appointment? If not, there is sometimes onward referral for further investigation up to the eye hospital and you'd be seen by an ophthalmologist for investigation or potentially treatment.

It's also good to know that it's the ophthalmologist that is responsible for registration. So if somebody has poorer vision, maybe a carer is asking about being registered as blind or partially sighted, it's not the optician that can actually do that, it's the ophthalmologist at the eye hospital.

June: Lastly I think one of the other things that you always have to ask at the sight test is when will be your next sight test, because that can vary depending on your age. If you have got an existing eye condition, or if you’ve got a family history. So always ask if they’re going to send you a reminder, because it might change.

Marion: What about if glasses are prescribed?

Iain: I think it’s really important to have a conversation with the optician and, or the dispensing optician about what type of glasses are suitable. Sometimes you might have your eye on a particular pair of spectacles or frames that you think are really nice, but it might be not the most suitable, depending on what’s been found as part of the eye examination. So speak to the optician, dispensing optician about what the most appropriate pair of glasses would be.

June: And don’t be worried about speaking to the optician about what type of glasses are most suitable, because opticians love to talk about glasses, don’t they? They love to talk about eye conditions, so they really look forward for you to ask them questions.

Iain: I think also, what are the glasses for? When should they be worn? If there are multiple glasses dispensed maybe one for near and one for distance, can that be marked on the glasses in some way, so the glasses don’t get mixed up? I think that’s really important.

June: Especially if someone is living in a care home or attending a service, where there are opportunities for glasses to get put down and misplaced or picked up by somebody else, it's good just to know who’s glasses are whose.

Iain: Yes, so somebody’s name and what they are for is really useful and most opticians will be able to inscribe that inside the glasses somewhere where it's not seen.

June: I think lastly, about glasses, it's important to remember that sometimes glasses don’t really correct vision. So for example, my mum, although she wears her glasses, as she says, it’s as good as it’s going to get. So now when she’s reading it has to be large print even with her glasses on. So finding out what the person can see with their glasses and what they can see without their glasses, if they're unable to wear their glasses, I think is important too.

Iain: I suppose, if we're on the glasses chat, if you get a new pair by all means keep an old pair, but don’t have 3 or 4 or 5 pairs because especially if you're getting support from anyone, they might pick up the wrong pair of glasses and might not correct your vision as well as possible.

June: But it is important to always have a spare pair just in case they get broken. You never want to be without your glasses for a few days, do you?

Marion: That’s a good tip. I've got a drawer at home and it's got loads of glasses in it and I don’t remember what’s what and how old it is. So I'd better have a look at that drawer.

So what would be your key messages for people to take away from today?

Iain: I suppose the top one is be prepared. Take a notebook and pen in case you want to note anything down that the optometrist says to you.

June: And think ahead about what you’re worried about or if you have got any questions or anything you want to ask the optometrist and write them down so you’ve got something to refer to.

Iain: If you’re unsure what to ask, you can also go onto the RNIB website, Older People and Complex Needs Team has a resource on that - questions to ask the optometrist. You can print that off and take that along as well.

Marion: Thanks both of you, you have shared some really useful information today. I appreciate the time you’ve taken. Hopefully, it will help people to be well-prepared for their eye appointments. I know I'm going to approach it a bit differently because of what you’ve have said. Thanks very much.

Closing: If you found this helpful, listen to our other podcasts in our supporting seniors series. We also have further information and support online from our Sight Loss Advice Service at rnib.org.uk. forward slash advice. For more information about working with older people who have sight loss, go onto the RNIB website at rnib.org.uk and type working with older people in the search box at the right hand side. You can also call the RNIB helpline on 0303 123 9999. We are the Older People and Complex Needs Team at RNIB. For more information about what we do search for us on the RNIB website.

Document ends.