



**CAVEAT
EMPTOR – LET
THE BUYER
BEWARE**

A Closer Look at Ordering Eyeglasses Online

Online shopping certainly offers convenience from the comfort of your home. It also allows you to research what you want while finding the right price to match your budget. That holds true even for eyeglasses.

Armed with a prescription from your optometrist, there is no shortage of websites that now cater to the vision crowd. But be wary, ordering a pair of glasses online is not as easy as purchasing a pair of blue jeans or theater tickets.

Every pair of eyeglasses must be custom-fitted to not just comfortably suit your face but also to meet your particular prescriptive needs. In short, you, your optometrist and your optician must work together in order to ensure a proper fit.

There's also a lingering question about the quality and safety of prescription eyewear ordered online. In a recent study, researchers discovered that nearly half of all glasses (44.8 percent) ordered online either contained an inaccurate prescription or didn't meet safety standards designed to protect the eyes.

(See box at right for more information)

What's an online diehard to do when it comes to buying eyeglasses on the Internet? You need to take several steps to ensure proper fit and look closely at each online seller's ability to help you before and after your purchase.

Getting The Right Look

Online retailers of eyeglasses provide an extensive selection of frames. You simply view the choices and features that include color, frame material such as plastic, metal, or a combination, as well as and how the lenses are held in place (such as drill-mounted or rimless).

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AOA Study Finds Issues With Safety, Prescriptions

When it comes to buying eyeglasses online according to a recent study by the American Optometric Association (AOA). Conducted last year with the Optical Laboratories Association and The Vision Council, the study discovered an alarming rate of problems with prescription compliance and impact resistance. Nearly half of the eyeglasses (44.8 percent) had incorrect prescriptions or safety issues.

Researchers had 10 individuals order two pairs of glasses, including pairs for both adults and children, from each of 10 of the most popular online optical vendors. In all 200 pairs were ordered, with frame styles chosen in the midrange options for each vendor, in varying frame materials, lens styles and prescriptions. Only 154 pairs of the orders were received. The study then analyzed lenses, including measurement of sphere power, cylinder power and axis, add power (if specified), separation of distance of optical centers and center thickness.

Several pairs were delivered incorrectly such as single vision instead of bifocals or lens treatments were added or omitted. Nearly three out of 10 (29 percent) pairs had at least one lens that failed to meet the required prescription, a problem typically found and corrected when ordered through and delivered by an optometrist. Nearly one-fourth (23 percent) of the lenses failed impact resistance testing, which highlights a major safety issue. Children's glasses performed even worse, with 29 percent failing impact testing.



You also need to consider the various options available for the lenses, and what is best for your particular prescription and lifestyle. Lenses come in various materials: such as traditional plastic, as well as thinner, lighter materials. Other considerations are the different coatings and treatments available such as non-glare coatings and photochromic lenses.

Does your face look better with round, oval or rectangular lenses? Of course, many of these lens shapes and material selections should be ruled out based on your prescription. For example, multifocal (bifocal, trifocal, and progressive addition) lenses generally require a specific minimum amount of room in the lenses to accommodate the entire prescription.

Some websites guide you through this process with tips to find the right frames and lenses to fit your face shape. Some sites use a virtual feature where you upload a photo and then see how each selection looks. Some even ship frames for free to try before you buy.

Accuracy Matters

Don't confuse the right look with the right measurements for your glasses. Pupil distance (PD) determines where to place the center of each lens in your frames to customize the optics to your eyes. This measurement is critical to ensure that your glasses provide the best possible vision results.

Measuring your PD is akin to cutting your own hair. It isn't easy. Most online retailers highly recommend that your optometrist provide this measurement to ensure accuracy. But this measurement is not part of your prescription and not normally provided unless you ask for it. Your optometrist or optician can even legitimately charge for the service of providing your PD. The measurements needed for multifocals can only be accurately made once the frame is selected and properly fitted to your face, so typically this measurement is simply estimated for online spectacles.

Comfort Counts

The right look and the right measurements matter little if your eyeglasses simply don't fit your face or your needs.

If your frames are too large, too heavy, or don't sit on the bridge of your nose the right way, they will slip. Besides being just downright uncomfortable, this may cause vision problems and/or headaches since you won't be looking through the correct areas of the lenses.

On the other hand, if you select frames that are too small, they may pinch and become extremely uncomfortable on your ears and nose and cause similar vision problems. Looking at an image of the frames on a computer screen makes it very difficult to know what size frame fits the best, and you certainly cannot tell how comfortable a frame is until you actually put it on.

An experienced optometrist and his/her staff have a big advantage in hands-on service in walking you through the various factors in finding the right eyeglasses. Plus, an optometrist's knowledge and experience can play a big role in guiding you to the frames and lenses that fit your needs and style. An experienced optometrist or optician can judge if a particular frame works well with your lenses, and can recommend thinner, lighter lenses to improve comfort and the look, especially if you have a special need for a stronger prescription. An experienced optometrist or optician will also be able to recommend the proper prescription sunglasses, safety glasses and even non-prescription sunglasses for those times you choose to wear contact lenses.

Consider This

If you want to order eyeglasses online, you should also check each online retailer's policies.

- **Returns:** What is the website's return policy if you are not satisfied with your purchase? How will the website deal with issues of prescription inaccuracies or other mistakes (wrong lenses coatings, wrong color, etc)?
- **Warranties:** Does the online retailer offers protection against lens scratching, how long this may be covered and what needs to be done to replace scratched lenses. How long is the frame warranty? What about children's frames?
- **Shipping:** The cost and timeliness of shipments varies. Who pays for shipping returns?
- **Pricing:** Are protective eyeglass cases and cleaning cloths included, or are they "extras" added to the cost?
- **Insurance:** Some websites do not accept vision insurance. If you have a Flexible Spending Account (FSA), check to see what's required to accept this as payment.
- **Maintenance:** Some websites provide a contact for this and may offer online tips for minor adjustments, but it might mean shipping your glasses away and being without them until the service is completed and they are returned.

Whether you go it alone on the Internet or use the services of your optometrist, it's important to be informed. Take the time to get it right. After all, it's essential to make the necessary selections and measurements to enhance your vision with a look that fits and provides comfort.

