



Dilated Eye Exams

Have you ever wondered why it is important to have your eyes dilated for an eye examination?

We'll be the first to admit that even though it's relatively painless, having your eyes dilated can be somewhat frustrating and visually uncomfortable. A dilated eye exam, however, is the best way to detect eye diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts, and macular degeneration. In addition, some systemic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes are first discovered during a dilated eye exam.

Your eye exam begins with a thorough investigation of the outer part of your eye, made up of the lids, lashes, conjunctiva, sclera and cornea. Using a microscope the doctor will also look at the anterior chamber, iris and crystalline lens. The iris is very similar to the shutter of a camera. When you take a picture on a bright sunny day, the shutter becomes smaller, allowing less light to enter. Likewise, your pupil becomes smaller when we shine a bright light at your eye, making it very difficult to see inside the eye. That's where the dilating drops come in. In fact, the only way for a doctor to see the entire retina during your examination is by dilating the pupils first. That is why we recommend annual eye examinations that include being dilated.

Dilating drops work on one of two iris muscles. They either stimulate the iris muscle that opens the pupil or they prevent the action of the iris muscle that closes the pupil. After the drops take effect, the doctor can get a much better view of your retina, optic nerve and blood vessels at the back of the eye.

Dilating drops also temporarily reduce the eye's ability to focus on near objects, known as accommodation. The natural lens in our eye is able to accommodate or adjust the eye's focus until about the age of 40. Children and young adults are especially good at this and their ability to accommodate sometimes prevents the doctor from getting an accurate refraction for glasses. That's why checking the refraction after dilating the eyes can provide a more accurate measurement of what an individual's "true" prescription really is.

Generally, the effects of dilation are the strongest during the first 1-2 hours after receiving drops and then start to diminish. In most cases, the effects wear off in 4-6 hours. When preparing for your eye examination, there are a few things you can do to make your visit a bit more comfortable:

- Don't plan any activities after your exam that requires crisp vision (i.e.: heavy reading, operating dangerous machinery, etc.).
- Bring along a pair of sunglasses for the ride home (Don't worry if you forget yours, just ask for a disposable pair as you check out).
- If you are concerned about driving home after your appointment (even with the sunglasses), please bring a friend.

Dilated eye examinations are a very important part of preventative eye care and your overall healthcare. We recommend that you have your eyes dilated regularly.

For more information about a dilated eye examination, contact our office at (248) 427-9620