



## What are the benefits of vision therapy?

People who participate in vision therapy programmes report a wide range of benefits. These differ from person to person and depend upon each person's visual experience.

Younger patients notice that they get better school grades and that homework is less of a chore. Adults report that they are more productive. Patients of all ages find reading is easier, that reading is fun and that they have improved at sports and no longer have headaches.

Vision therapy can even affect things that you might not associate with vision. People have noticed that they are more confident and outgoing, have higher self-esteem and are more confident about trying new experiences.

Each vision therapy patient has a list of things that they wish to improve and vision therapists work with patients to help them achieve those personal goals, whatever they may be.

## What kind of Optometrist do I need?

The Optometrist you need to visit is a professional interested in helping patients improve the functioning of their entire visual system. These specialists, spend years in post-graduate education learning how to best help their patients achieve their goals.

Not all Optometrists choose to become involved in providing extensive visual skill assessments. To help you make sure that your Optometrist is someone who promotes vision care, directed at your whole visual process, you may want to discuss the following questions with them or their reception staff:

1. Do you provide school or work-related visual perception tests?
2. Do you provide a full series of near point vision tests?
3. Do you provide full vision care and vision therapy in your practice or, will you refer me to someone else if necessary?
4. Will you see me again to determine my progress?

With this information, you can then feel confident that your vision needs will be addressed by your Behavioural Optometrist.

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# Vision Therapy

Building Visual Skills

There are many important skills that you need in order for your visual system to work efficiently. Sometimes these skills don't develop the way they should. This happens for a variety of reasons, some of which we know about and there are others, that are still unknown.

Vision therapy is a service provided by Behavioural Optometrists to help people improve their visual abilities. Vision therapy works to improve these basic abilities, much like occupational therapy or speech therapy works to improve other basic skills.

## What is visual skill?

Visual skill that can be developed and improved through vision therapy and includes these abilities:

### Tracking:

Imagine watching someone throw a ball to you. Your eyes follow the path of this ball to your hands. You are using tracking - the ability to follow a moving object with your eyes. Tracking is vitally important when reading. You must be able to move your eyes accurately to get the full meaning when reading across a line of print.

### Fixation:

When we read, we use fixation - the ability to find and look at a series of stationary objects (like words on a page).

### Focus Change:

Children use this skill constantly. Every time they look from the board to their paper and back, they are changing focus. Adults use this skill as well. While driving, it is important to be able to change your focus from the road to the instrument panel on your dashboard quickly and precisely.

### Visual Discrimination:

The ability to detect small differences needs to be fast and accurate. When driving a car you need to read the street sign as "Henry" not "Harry"; reading "though" not "through." This requires focusing skills, tracking, and fixation.

### Binocularity:

Our eyes were designed to work together by pointing at the same place and moving together accurately and smoothly as one.

### Depth Perception:

This is directly related to binocularity and helps you to see in three dimensions. It gives you a finely tuned sense of exactly where things are. This is directly related to sports performance and driving a car.

### Peripheral Vision:

You've probably caught yourself saying "...out of the corner of my eye...". You were referring to peripheral vision - the ability to notice things outside of your direct line of sight and understand what is going on around you, even though you aren't looking directly at them. Peripheral vision also helps to direct your visual system so you know where to look next when reading.

### Visual Memory:

A skill to help us remember and "picture" in our minds things we've seen before. This skill helps you in many ways - finding your lost keys, recalling information that you've read before, giving directions to a specific place. Visualisation is the skill that we use to "see" what we imagine as we read or hear a story. Most great readers, writers, and spellers have great visualization skills.

### Near and Distance Acuity:

Acuity is the ability to see clearly far away and close up. 20/20 or 6/6 is the visual acuity that most people think of when they think of good vision or hear the word "Optometrist." Seeing clearly is very important, but acuity is just one of the many skills important to healthy vision.

## Symptoms of a vision problem

What happens when your vision isn't working at its best? Symptoms of a vision problem may include:

### Headaches:

These may develop especially following closeup work, and occur near the eyes, forehead, or at the back of the head.

### Double vision:

Seeing two of something when only one exists.

### Suppression:

This occurs while both eyes are being used to view normally visible objects, the brain blocks or ignores all or part of the objects in one eye to avoid seeing double.

### Poor or erratic performance:

Losing your place while reading, re-reading words or lines, difficulty understanding what you've read, or reading slowly. Having difficulty with sports, dropping the ball, over or under throwing, or poor hitting.

### Discomfort or Fatigue:

Body tension, stress or pain, weariness at the end of a school or workday. In many cases, proper glasses, contact lenses, or a combination of vision therapy and glasses can improve, prevent, or remedy vision problems in both children and adults.

## What is vision therapy?

If you think that you or someone you know is experiencing problems and could benefit from vision therapy, the first step is to schedule an appointment with your local Behavioral Optometrist. The Optometrist will meet with you, perform a complete vision examination that includes a skills assessment and explain exactly what would be best for you.

For most people, vision therapy means once a week visits to their Optometrist's practice, where they work with the Optometrist or a trained Vision Therapist working under the supervision of the Optometrist. You will be guided through activities designed to correct visual processing problems and/or build your visual skill. The activities are often fun, though challenging. Your therapist might give you a few activities to work on at home, or even suggest purchase of some software. These vision activities, or exercises, usually only take about 15 minutes a day.