

THE RISKS OF INTERNET DISPENSING

Purchasing Eyewear on the Internet

Online purchasing has made its way into virtually every aspect of life. In many cases, shopping on the Internet is easy and convenient and provides a quality, reliable service. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The attraction of buying prescription eyewear over the Internet is that it may be faster or cheaper than visiting an optical store. But at what cost?

Buying prescription eyewear is not like shopping for books or clothes. In Ontario, only Regulated, Licensed Opticians, Optometrists and Ophthalmologists are legally permitted to dispense prescription eyeglasses and contact lenses. In certain limited circumstances, Opticians are permitted to dispense eyewear to patients via the Internet.¹ If the dispensing is being done by an Optician, one requirement is that you must already be a patient of the Optician.

UNREGULATED SELLING OF PRESCRIPTION EYEWEAR OVER THE INTERNET IN ONTARIO IS NOT JUST UNSAFE. IT IS ALSO ILLEGAL.

The information provided below refers only to those circumstances where prescription eyewear is purchased over the Internet from someone who is not authorized to dispense – that is, from someone who is not a Licensed Optician, Optometrist or Ophthalmologist. Purchasing prescription eyeglasses and contact lenses from someone you do not know brings with it a range of risks. Some of these risks relate to the health of the eye (e.g. improperly fitted contact lenses can cause injury to the cornea) and some relate to the effectiveness of the eyewear (e.g. eyeglasses with lenses that do not match a patient's eye measurements can impair vision). Improperly fitted eyewear can interfere with your ability to see, causing impaired depth perception, blurred vision, falls and other accidents, and worsened near or far-sightedness.

The following is just a partial list of the risks and problems posed by Internet dispensing:

- You have no guarantee that you are dealing with a Licensed Optician, Optometrist or Ophthalmologist. Vision care via the internet may be and sometimes is provided by inexperienced people who are not members of one of the regulated health professions.
- Opticians have the ability to recognize health issues dealing with the cornea and to refer a patient to another health professional before any serious harm can come to the eye.
- Opticians are also trained to take proper anatomical measurements, make appropriate initial and ongoing adjustments to eyewear, and to perform thorough pre- and post-assessment of contact lenses to ensure vision health and safety, comfort, peak performance and clear accurate vision. You cannot get this kind of care over the Internet.

¹ Optometrists and Ophthalmologists may have their own requirements for dispensing over the Internet.

- Eyeglasses and contact lenses need to be fitted to each individual patient based on measurements of the eye and face. This also cannot be done over the Internet.
- Improperly fitted eyeglasses and contact lenses can cause headaches, dizziness, and nausea.
- Contact lenses are “medical devices” regulated by Health Canada. When you purchase contact lenses over the Internet, you may get a product that does not meet Health Canada’s requirements for safety, effectiveness and quality.
- You may get a product that has been recalled due to safety concerns.
- You may get a counterfeit product (e.g. a lower-quality product that is falsely labelled as being a higher-quality brand).
- You may receive a product that has not been stored properly. Contact lenses need to be protected from freezing and heat. When you order contacts over the Internet, you do not know where the product has been stored or for how long.
- You may receive a product that has expired. Contact lenses have an expiry date, after which it is not necessarily safe to use the product.

Prescription eyewear is not “*one size fits all*”. Opticians are front line, regulated health care professionals who serve as public educators on eye care issues including disease prevention and detection and are trained to answer patients’ questions on a broad range of eye care issues, from dry eyes to corrective surgery. Opticians determine what kinds of lenses and frames are required based on a patient’s prescription, needs and individual circumstances. Opticians also receive training in eye health problems and may recognize an issue that should be treated by an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist.

**WHEN YOU PURCHASE PRESCRIPTION EYEGLASSES
OR CONTACT LENSES, YOU ARE MORE THAN A
CONSUMER – YOU ARE A PATIENT.**

Of the five senses - sight, sound, smell, touch and taste - the brain relies first and foremost on sight to provide essential information. The ability of the brain to assess and evaluate situations, determine courses of action and debate the risks associated with specific courses of action are determined, in part, by its ability to understand the images transferred from the eye. Only Opticians, Optometrists and Ophthalmologists have the necessary knowledge, skill, judgment, and accountability to dispense eyewear safely and competently.

Beyond any doubt, poorly dispensed eyewear can be detrimental to your vision. It is critical that patients deal only with regulated eye care professionals who will ensure that their eyes, and their vision, remain healthy and protected.

The College of Opticians of Ontario supports the National Public Awareness Initiative by the Opticians Council of Canada. Learn more about Licensed Opticians & your vision. Visit: www.LicensedOptician.ca