

The Wait: Our Consummate Challenge
By Sue Stuhr

One of the most common questions we hear from our patients is, “How long will I be in the office for my appointment?” It seems like such a simple question, but it has a surprisingly complex answer.

The length of your appointment will depend on the type of exam you receive, which can be broken down into two basic types: dilated or undilated. An example of an undilated exam may be a return visit for an existing condition, such as an abrasion, infection, or pressure check. If you are scheduled for this type of an exam, the appointment may take as little as 30 minutes. A dilated exam may be scheduled for a vision exam, in preparation for surgery, or for a medical condition such as diabetes, cataracts, macular degeneration, etc. This type of appointment is expected to take as long as 90 minutes. Both types of appointments begin in the same manner with a technician gathering information for the doctor. Our technicians obtain or update your medical history and ask questions concerning any new problems or concerns to bring to the doctor’s attention. Our technicians do our pre-exam measurements. Ophthalmology is a highly technical field and eye measurements are a combination of computerized and manual, as well as objective and subjective (requiring your assistance), testing. Our technicians then start the dilation process by instilling drops which take 15-20 minutes for maximum effect, after which the doctor will review the information gathered by the technician, perform your exam and discuss any concerns with you regarding the health of your eyes.

Pediatric exams usually take longer. It is not uncommon for these visits to take over two hours because additional testing, such as color vision, extensive eye muscle evaluation, and stereo vision, is often required. In addition, the medications used to dilate pediatric eyes are stronger and take longer to become effective (20-30 minutes to reach maximum effect). We understand that the longer wait can be very difficult on children and, with parental approval, we have child-friendly videos for viewing to help pass the time.

Additional testing by our technicians is performed as ordered by your doctor based on need, and/or preparation for surgery, which can also extend your time with us. We try to make the best decisions possible when considering your valuable time, the urgency of the ordered testing, and our schedule when these additional tests are ordered.

It is our goal to stay on schedule as much as possible. However, because we are a medical office, unexpected needs do arise and it is our policy to never turn away a patient in need. Sometimes, during a routine exam, a finding that must be addressed in more detail arises, or a patient may have extensive questions about a medical condition. Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict when these situations may occur. Please rest assured that if we are running behind schedule *it is often because a patient needed our extra time and care, and if the situation were reversed with you or your loved one, we would be there for you as well.* We hope this article answers some questions for you. We realize how difficult it is to wait in a doctor’s office and we do appreciate your patience and understanding.