



How to Read Your Lens Prescription

Have you ever gotten your lens prescription and wondered what it all means? Sure, your doctor may have mentioned that you're nearsighted or farsighted, but what does that mean in all the little symbols scribbled on your prescription? Here's what you need to know:

Dr. XYZ Optical

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New York, NY
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Patient _____
Expiration Date _____

RX		Spherical	Cylindrical	Axis	Prism	Base
D.V.	O.D.					
	O.S.					
N.V.	O.D.					
	O.S.					

Sample Prescription Sheet

Deciphering the Prescription Sheet Abbreviations:

D.V.: This refers to the portion of your prescription that controls your ability to see far away.

N.V.: The portion that controls your ability to see things nearby.

O.D.: "Oculus Dexter" or latin for your right eye.

O.S.: "Oculus Sinister" or latin for your left eye.

Spherical: Sometimes also "Sphere" or "SPH," this refers to the amount of lens power needed to correct nearsightedness or farsightedness. A negative sign (-) represents nearsightedness while a positive sign (+) or sometimes no sign indicates farsightedness.

Cylindrical: This section represents the correction needed for an astigmatism, which is affected by how well your eye focuses light onto the retina. If you have no astigmatism, your prescription will have no number in this section. Like with the spherical numbers, a cylindrical number may be preceded with a minus or plus sign to represent nearsighted astigmatism and farsighted astigmatism respectively.

Axis: Used to describe the orientation of a cylindrical lens. When you have an astigmatism, items are blurred in a particular direction, and the axis of a cylindrical lens accounts for that direction of blur. Again, if you do not have an astigmatism, you will have no number present in this section.



Prism: This only occurs in a small amount of prescriptions, and is used to correct problems with eye alignment caused by eye muscle imbalances.

Base: This sections goes with prism and is meant to note the direction of the prism's base, or thickest edge. There are four possible abbreviations used to noted prism direction: BD= base down, BU = base up, BI= base in (towards wearer's nose), or BO=base out (towards wearer's ear).

Add: Found most often in progressive lens prescriptions, this number is used to indicate corrections in for reading due to presbyopia. This number is always positive, even if a plus sign is not used.

What your numbers mean: All numbers featured on an eyeglass prescription are measured in diopters (D), which is a unit that measures the ability of your eye to bend light (also known as refraction). The farther the number is from zero, the greater correction you need to refract light properly to reach proper vision (usually 20/20). The only number not measure in diopters is the axis, which is measured in degrees instead.

Are Glasses and Contacts Prescriptions the Same?

No. Eyeglass prescriptions do not have certain components vital to a proper contact lens prescription. Since glasses are worn further away from the surface of the eye, versus contact lenses, which are worn on the cornea, some adjustment is made to change the prescription's power. Also, a contact lens prescription must specify the central curve of the back surface of the lens, lens diameter, and brand name of the lens.

