

BUILDING YOUR SPORTS VISION PRACTICE

GROWTH

FOUR QUICK WINS

If you want to to expand your practice or develop a new specialism, have you thought of focusing on sports eyewear and eyecare? With specialist products and qualifications now available, plus research to help sports people perform to the max, this is a fascinating area, and one in which patients are willing to invest in order to improve their enjoyment and performance.

1. STUDY THE SCIENCE BEHIND SPORTS VISION

We often take our eyes for granted, but sports vision experts are trained to consider eye dominance and how that relates to the primary visual skills in sport, aiming, where you are relative to the object in space, and the ability to anticipate the arrival of the object based on depth perception. An unstable right dominant eye that tends to diverge as the eye fatigues will lead to a change in perceived position of the ball as attention swaps to the non-dominant eye. A specialist qualification in sports vision will allow you to identify issues and implement a training programme, with exercises to improve focusing and accommodation. For good dispensing for sports, peripheral vision is critical, so you need to consider wraparound frames, as well as advances in freeform lenses and lens materials, understanding, for example, whether polycarbonate or Trivex is better and their tinting possibilities. Knowledge about tints is vital, such as how and when to apply photochromic tints and the kind of tint that someone needs. You also need to know when contact lenses might be best.

2. STOCK AND DISPLAY

Look at the stock you have, and consider if it meets the needs of serious sports people. Does it occupy a prominent place in the practice? Do you have an extensive range of frames and demonstration lenses to show patients the different benefits of tints, for example? A practice sports kit is a good way to do this. Include specialist sports specs, goggles and diving masks, and consider what you can offer to children as well as adults.

3. THE TEAM

Is your team briefed on the optical requirements of different sports? Take time to schedule in some training sessions looking at different sports. You can focus on winter

sports and summer sports separately, or look at a specialism like water sports. Some patients may need more than one product which can make a useful case study for the team to discuss: a triathlete, for example, might need different products for swimming, cycling and running. Train your team to understand the different requirements for someone who needs plano lenses compared to a prescription product. If you have someone in your practice who is particularly keen, you could appoint them 'sports champion', and facilitate them to do extra training. Ensure every team member knows that it is a good idea to raise the issue of sports vision during a dispense: a parent of a myopic child may not know, for example, that they can get prescription swimming goggles which make an easy add on during the dispense and will improve the child's experience in the pool.

4. BUILD LOCAL LINKS

You need to build your reputation as the 'go to' place for sports vision in your area. One great way to do this is to build links with local sports clubs and professionals. Consider what you have to offer them before you approach, and develop a range of suitable products across a range of price bands. As an example, golf club members are often serious about their sport and willing to invest. Introduce yourself, and your products, to the golf pros and offer them a competitive price. This gives you the chance to explain about the benefits of high contrast lenses, polarised lenses, interchangeable lens features, and specialist fits. The pros can then refer clients on. Think how this can apply to other sports clubs in your area. Can you advertise in their programme, sponsor a team or individual sportsperson, put a banner alongside a pitch, or develop a link where the club pays for team members to have a regular eye check at your practice? Develop a regular programme of reaching out to a new club each month to ensure that your practice remains the premier destination for sports vision.

For more information visit www.sportvision.co.uk

You can also learn more about finding the best lenses for sport in two articles that Geraint Griffiths wrote for Dispensing Optics in April & May 2013.