

OPTICAL UNCENSORED

5 Mistakes People Make Buying Glasses Online

...and exactly what to do instead — from someone who's fit lenses for 20+ years and isn't selling you a pair.

Real advice. No agenda.

Why listen to me

I've been a licensed optician for over 20 years. I've fit thousands of pairs of glasses, fixed thousands of pairs that were bought wrong, and I don't work for any retailer — online or in-store. I don't get a commission for telling you to avoid online glasses, and I don't get one for telling you to buy them either.

Buying glasses online can be a genuinely good decision. It can also be a genuinely bad one — depending on your prescription, your face, and whether you know what you're actually ordering. This guide is the version of that conversation I'd have with you at the counter, if you were standing in front of me instead of a checkout page.

One rule sits underneath everything in this guide:

“Use the tool. Keep the professional.”

— *The Optical Uncensored position*

Online retailers are a tool. A good one, sometimes. They are not a replacement for an optician who can actually look at your eyes, your face, and your prescription and tell you when something's off. Use both, in the right order.

MISTAKE 01

Guessing your PD instead of measuring it

Your pupillary distance (PD) — the space between the centers of your pupils — determines whether the optical center of your lens lines up with where you're actually looking. Get it wrong and you don't just get "slightly off" glasses. You get eye strain, headaches, and — in progressive lenses especially — a pair that never quite feels right no matter how many times you adjust the frame.

Most people guess, use a phone app measurement, or pull a number off an old prescription that was never meant for this. Phone-app PD measurements are notoriously inconsistent — small movements, camera angle, and screen calibration all throw the number off by a millimeter or two. That doesn't sound like much. In a progressive lens, it's the difference between a lens that works and one that doesn't.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Ask your eye doctor to write your PD on your prescription at your next exam — most will do this for free if you ask. If you already have an old prescription, many optical offices (including ones that had nothing to do with your exam) will measure PD for a small fee or for free. Do this once, write it down, and reuse it for every online order going forward.

MISTAKE 02

Buying the wrong lens index for your prescription

"Index" is the thickness rating of your lens material. Online retailers often upsell high-index lenses (1.67, 1.74) as a premium option for everyone. Sometimes that's a genuinely useful upgrade. Sometimes it's padding on the invoice for a prescription that didn't need it.

People either overspend on an index their prescription doesn't require, or underspend and end up with lenses so thick they look and feel wrong in the frame they picked. Both mistakes come from the same place: nobody explained what the numbers on your prescription actually mean for lens thickness.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

As a rough guide: mild prescriptions (under about ± 2.00) rarely need anything above standard 1.50 or 1.56 index. Moderate to strong prescriptions (roughly ± 2.00 to ± 4.00) often benefit from 1.61 or 1.67. Strong prescriptions (above ± 4.00) are usually where 1.67 or 1.74 earns its price. If a checkout page recommends an index without asking your actual prescription numbers first, treat that as a sales suggestion, not a professional one.

MISTAKE 03

Skipping the frame measurements that actually matter

A frame that looks right in a photo can still be wrong for your face. Frame dimensions — width, bridge size, temple length — aren't cosmetic details. They're the difference between glasses that sit correctly

on your nose and ears versus glasses that slide, pinch, or sit crooked no matter how many times you adjust them.

Shoppers pick frames based on how they look on a model or in a mirror app, without checking the actual millimeter measurements against their own face. Two frames that look nearly identical in a product photo can differ by 8-10mm in width — enough to change how the whole pair sits.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Grab a pair of glasses you already own and like the fit of. Check the small numbers printed inside the temple arm (something like 52■18—140). Use those numbers as your baseline when comparing frame sizes on any site you're ordering from, rather than judging fit from a photo alone.

MISTAKE 04

Treating every prescription as “online-safe”

Not every prescription is a good candidate for an online order — at least not without a professional check first. Strong astigmatism corrections, high prescriptions, significant differences between your two eyes, and certain progressive or multifocal prescriptions are far more sensitive to small measurement or fitting errors than a simple, mild single-vision prescription is.

Online retailers don't turn away these orders — most will happily sell to anyone with a valid prescription, regardless of how demanding it is to get right. The complexity risk gets passed entirely to you.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

If your prescription includes a cylinder (astigmatism) correction above about 2.00, a notable difference between your right and left eye, or you're being fit for progressives for the first time, get your first pair from an in-person optician — then use online retailers for repeat orders once you know your exact specs work for you.

MISTAKE 05

Not knowing what to do when something's wrong

New glasses almost always feel slightly “off” for the first few days — that's normal adaptation, especially with any change in prescription or with progressives. The problem is most online buyers don't know how to tell the difference between “my eyes are adjusting” and “this pair is actually wrong.”

People either return glasses that just needed a few days of adjustment, or — more often — they keep wearing a genuinely wrong pair because they assume the discomfort is supposed to go away on its own.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Give any new pair 3-5 days of normal wear before judging it. If after that point you still have headaches, visible distortion at the edges (outside of expected progressive blur zones), or the frame visibly sits crooked or pinches — that's not adjustment, that's a return. Most online retailers have a return or remake window; use it. A local optician can also often diagnose the specific issue in minutes, even if they didn't sell you the pair.

BONUS

If you're ready to order online

Once you know your real PD, the right index for your prescription, and your frame measurements, online ordering gets a lot safer. Here's where I'd point people, based on prescription type and budget — not based on who pays the best commission.

Zenni Optical	Best for: budget shoppers, simple to moderate prescriptions
EyeBuyDirect	Best for: style-forward frames on a budget, easy exchanges
Amazon (accessories)	Best for: cases, cleaning kits, blue-light add-ons — not your primary pair

Direct links to these retailers are coming soon as this guide gets updated — for now, search each name directly.

ONE LAST THING

Stay in the loop

This guide is the start, not the whole conversation. I put out new videos and breakdowns every week on the real, non-sponsored version of buying glasses — online or in person. Come find the channel:

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