



# Notice of Privacy Practices

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**We take your privacy seriously and are committed to keeping your health information safe. We're also required by law to let you know how we handle your information and to follow the privacy policies we've outlined. This notice explains how we protect your health information and the rights you have when it comes to that information.**

## **How We Use or Share Your Health Information**

We may need to use or share your health information for things like providing care, handling billing, or running our office. These are the most common reasons we would use your information — and we don't need your specific permission for them. However, you do have the right to ask us not to use or share your information in certain ways.

### **Treatment**

We may use or share your information to help with your care. For example, we might:

- Schedule or change appointments, including leaving basic messages (without personal details) at your home, work, voicemail, by text, or email
- Call your name in the waiting room
- Prescribe glasses, contacts, or medications, and share that info with suppliers by phone, fax, or electronically (including refills)
- Let you know when your ophthalmic goods (glasses or contact lenses) are ready, leaving non-personal messages if needed
- Refer you to another doctor
- Request past health records from other providers you've seen
- Talk with you directly about your care, or with friends/family members you've allowed or implied can be included
- Send reminders by mail, phone, voicemail, text, or email when it's time for follow-up care (again, without personal health details)
- Provide your records securely through fax, email, patient portal, printed copies, or by mail—if you ask us to

### **Payment**

We also use your information to handle billing and insurance. This might include:

- Asking about your vision and/or medical insurance coverage or other payment options
- Sending bills to your insurance company or to you
- Giving insurance companies the information they need to process payments
- Sending payment reminders to the person listed as responsible on your account (which may include a summary of services and diagnoses)
- Working to collect any unpaid balances, either directly or through a third party like a collection agency or attorney

If you pay for your care out of pocket and ask us not to share details with your insurance provider, we'll honor that—just let us know, and as long as the law allows, we'll limit the information shared.

### **Business Operations**

Sometimes we need to use or share your information as part of running our practice. For example:

- Doing internal audits or reviews
- Participating in insurance or managed care networks
- Preparing for legal matters
- Planning and improving our services
- Following government requirements or audits (like Medicare/Medicaid)
- Renewing or maintaining licenses for our doctors
- Letting you know about the services or products we offer
- Sharing limited vision-related info with schools, the Department of Public Safety, or agencies involved in disability services

### **Uses and Disclosures for Other Reasons Not Needing Permission**

In a few specific cases, we may be allowed—or required by law—to share your health information without asking for your permission first. These situations don't come up often, but it's important to know they're possible. Here are some examples:

- **When required by law**, such as when state or federal rules say we must report certain health information
- **For public health purposes**, like reporting contagious diseases, taking part in health investigations, or sharing information with the FDA about medications or medical devices
- **To report abuse, neglect, or violence**, if there's a concern that someone is being harmed or is at risk
- **For legal matters**, if we're responding to a court order, subpoena, or other official request
- **To a medical examiner or funeral director**, to help identify someone who has passed away or assist with burial
- **To organizations involved in organ or tissue donation**
- **For approved medical research**, under strict guidelines
- **To help prevent a serious threat to someone's health or safety**
- **For military or national security reasons**, when allowed by law

- **When sharing information that has been de-identified**, meaning it can't be traced back to you
- **For workers' compensation claims**, to meet legal requirements
- **As part of a "limited data set"**, for research or public health work (this includes only essential, non-identifying information)
- **When incidental sharing happens**, such as someone briefly overhearing part of a conversation—these are rare and unavoidable side effects of permitted activities
- **For specific reporting needs**, like school vision screenings, driver's license forms, or occupational/recreational license certifications (e.g., for pilots)
- **With trusted partners, known as business associates, who help us run our practice.** These partners must agree to keep your information private, and they're also required to make sure any of their partners follow the same rules
- **With family or friends who are involved in your care.** If you don't object—and especially if they're with you during your visit—we may assume it's okay to talk about your care with them

### **Sharing Information with Someone Helping You**

At Tomasino Goerss Vision Source, we understand that sometimes you may need a friend or family member to help you. We're happy to speak with someone calling on your behalf to schedule or change an appointment, check on the status of your eyeglasses, contact lenses, or other optical items, or assist with picking up or delivering them.

When we talk to someone for you—whether by phone or in person—we'll only share the details needed to take care of the specific request. We won't share any personal health or vision information unless you've given us permission to do so.

If you bring someone with you into an exam room, treatment area, dispensary, or office space where your care or account is being discussed, we'll assume that you're okay with that person being present and hearing that information.

### **Other Ways We May Use or Share Your Information**

We won't use or share your health information for things like marketing or other non-routine purposes unless you give us written permission by signing an Authorization for Release of Identifying Health Information. This form follows the rules set by state and federal law.

Either you or Tomasino Goerss Vision Source can request this kind of authorization. If it meets the legal requirements, we'll honor it. You're never required to sign—if you choose not to, we simply won't use or share the information in that way.

If you do decide to sign an authorization, you can change your mind and cancel it at any time. To do that, just send a written request to the Office Manager listed at the beginning of this notice.

## **Your Rights When It Comes to Your Health Information**

You have several important rights when it comes to your personal health information. Here's a summary of what you're entitled to:

### **1. Requesting Limits on How We Use or Share Your Info**

You can ask us to limit how we use or share your information for treatment, payment, or business purposes. These requests must be made in writing to the Office Manager (listed at the beginning of this notice). While we're not required to agree to every request, if we do agree, we'll follow the limits you've asked for.

### **2. Requesting Private or Special Ways to Communicate**

If you'd prefer we contact you in a specific way—like only calling your home phone or using a certain email address—you can ask us to do that. As long as your request is reasonable, and you're okay with covering any extra costs (if there are any), we'll do our best to honor it. These requests should also be directed to the Office Manager.

### **3. Reviewing or Getting Copies of Your Records**

You have the right to see or get copies of your health records. In most cases, we'll gladly provide them. However, in rare situations, we may have to deny access. If that happens, we'll explain why in writing. You also have the right to request a review of that decision by another licensed provider who wasn't involved in the original denial—and we'll follow their decision.

You don't *have* to submit your request in writing, but it helps speed things up. We try to respond quickly—usually within a day or two—but the law gives us a little more time if needed. In some cases, we may ask for extra time, and we'll let you know if we do.

We can send your records in the format you prefer. Our approved options include secure email, authorized electronic health systems, or media we provide (like a flash drive).

### **4. Asking Us to Correct or Update Your Records**

If you believe any part of your health record is wrong or incomplete, you can ask us to fix it. Just send your request in writing to the Office Manager. If we agree, we'll make the changes within 30 days and send updated information to you and anyone else you'd like. If we don't agree, we'll explain why in writing. You'll then have the option to write your own statement explaining your point of view, which we'll add to your records—along with a response from us, if needed.

### **5. Requesting a List of Who We've Shared Your Info With**

You can ask for a list of any non-routine times we've shared your health information in the past six years. This doesn't include common situations like treatment, billing, or regular office operations. You're entitled to one free list each year. If you want more than one, we charge \$200 per additional list, which must be paid in advance.

We usually respond to these requests within 30 days, but we may take an extra 30 days if needed—and we'll let you know if that's the case.

### **6. Getting Another Copy of This Privacy Notice**

If you ever need another copy of this Notice of Privacy Practices, just ask at our front desk or visit our website (listed at the beginning of this notice).

## **What Happens If There's a Breach of Your Information**

At Tomasino Goerss Vision Source, we take your privacy seriously. If there's ever a breach of your personal health information that we're legally required to report, we will follow all the rules set by HIPAA and any applicable state laws.

If something like this happens, we'll take all the necessary steps to stay in compliance. This may include notifying you, any business partners involved, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and, in some cases, local media—depending on what the law requires.

## **Whistleblower Protection Rule**

At Tomasino Goerss Vision Source, we respect your right to speak up if you have concerns about how we handle privacy or security. If you choose to share those concerns with the Office for Civil Rights, the Office of the Inspector General, or your state's Attorney General, we will not take any action against you for doing so. Your voice is protected, and we take that seriously.

## **If We Make Changes to This Privacy Notice**

We're required by law to follow the terms of this Privacy Notice as long as it stays in effect. However, we may update it from time to time if our privacy practices change in a big way.

If we do make changes, the new version will apply to all your current health information—as well as anything we collect moving forward. When that happens, we'll post the updated notice in our office and on our website so you'll always know where things stand.

## **Have a Privacy Concern? Let Us Know**

If you ever feel that your privacy hasn't been properly protected at Tomasino Goerss Vision Source, we want to hear about it. Please reach out to our Office Manager (listed at the beginning of this notice) to share your concerns. While we ask that you put your concerns in writing, we're more than happy to work with you to find a solution.

Your feedback matters—and you also have the right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights, or with your state's Attorney General. Just know that we will never take any negative action against you for speaking up.

## **Have Questions? We're Here to Help**

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to our Office Manager at the phone number listed in this notice. We're happy to help and want to make sure you feel informed and comfortable.