

Pupil dynamics with periodic flashes: effect of age on mesopic adaptation

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Received 7 April 2016; revised 7 June 2016; accepted 10 June 2016; posted 14 June 2016 (Doc. ID 262568); published 0 MONTH 0000

1 The purpose of this study is to determine the pupillary dynamics with periodical flashes from a peripheral glare source, in similar conditions to night driving, while focusing on dependence with age. We measured two groups of people: youth and adults. Maximum pupil size decreases due to periodic flashes. Latency does not present significant differences. The reduction of pupil size is greater for older adults. The presence of a peripheral and periodic glare source modifies the pupil size. This leads to a reduction of retinal illuminance, which is greater for older adults. © 2016 Optical Society of America

OCIS codes: (330.4595) Optical effects on vision; (330.7320) Vision adaptation; 330.7323..

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1364/JOSAA.99.099999>

1. INTRODUCTION

Change in pupil size is one of the adaptation mechanisms used by the visual system when there are changes in the luminance of a scene. When the pupil contracts, due to the presence of a glare source, there are two simultaneous effects. There is loss in the quantity of light that reaches the retina, that is, of the retinal illuminance. There also is an improvement in the quality of the retinal image. This is due to the reduction of aberrations and the increase in the depth of focus [1–3]. Both of these effects affect the visual response. For this reason, the estimation of the pupil size and its dynamic is often desirable. The information about the behavior of the pupil is important for evaluating the reduction of the visual functions in different conditions of everyday life.

This is particularly important in the study of the effects of sources of glare on night driving. Mesopic adaptation has been of interest in several previous works. Specifically, the measurements of visual efficiency in foveal and peripheral vision [4–6], together with the evaluation of the brightness of the scene with transient [7,8] and steady glare [9], have been studied. In studies such as these, it is necessary to know the pupil size in order to be able to interpret the results.

A previous investigation regarding pupil size [10], in the mesopic range (0.5 cd/m²) and for just one glare source, showed the stability of the latency time. It had taken into account different

levels of glare characterized by the photopic illuminance measured at the cornea (15, 30, and 60 lux) and a range of ages between 19 and 53 years old [10]. Ellis [11] studied the changes in pupil light reflex while increasing the luminance in photopic levels [10]. On the other hand, the age, as a factor affecting light-adapting pupil size was one of the variables well studied by Winn *et al.* [12]. It is well established that the maximum pupil size in steady adaptation is smaller in elderly adults. This is a condition known as senile miosis. Bitsios *et al.* [13] studied resting pupil diameter, constriction velocity, and other parameters such as scotopic and photopic levels of adaptation. The authors found differences in the results from the different age groups.

In the case of night driving along motorways, the visual system is usually subjected to sequences of multiple flashes. This has peaked our interest in the study of the dynamics of the pupil diameter. We are particularly interested in its dependence with age.

The hypothesis of this paper is that, when periodic flashes occur, the diameter of the pupil does not recover its initial value. Furthermore, the reduction, which modifies the state of visual adaptation, is greatest in older adults. For this reason, we have studied the pupil dynamics when observers' eyes are exposed to sequences of dazzling flashes. We did this while taking into account different adaptation luminances and glare illuminance.

70 2. METHODOLOGY

71 The experiment consisted of registering changes of pupil diam-
 72 eter while the subject was watching a cross. At the same time, a
 73 glare source was being periodically turned on and off. A pro-
 74 gram developed in MATLAB generated the white fixation
 75 cross. The cross was generated at exactly 4 deg in the center
 76 of a display (32.5 cm by 24.5 cm). An eye tracker camera
 77 (Eyetracker ViewPoint) was synchronized with the control of
 78 the glare source. We reported the size of the eye's entrance pupil
 79 the way most studies do. We used the virtual image of the
 80 physical pupil as seen through the cornea.

81 The glare was generated by means of an incandescent lamp,
 82 which was located at 10 deg from the line of sight of the subject
 83 and at the same height as the fixed cross. This generated an
 84 illuminance value of 60 lux, which was measured over the cor-
 85 nea of the subject's right eye. The subject's pupil size was reg-
 86 istered, and the adaptation was binocular. The time of the glare
 87 presentation was controlled by means of an electronic shutter
 88 with an aperture of 1.5°.

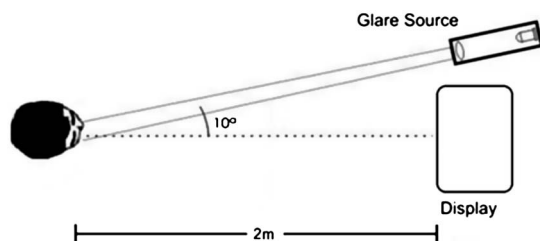
89 The subject's head was fixed on a chin rest at a distance of
 90 2 m from the display. We took into account the results
 91 obtained by Radhakrishnan and Neil Charman [14]. These au-
 92 thors have shown that there is no accommodative miosis when
 93 the distance of accommodation is greater than 1 m. The time
 94 adaptation to the background luminance was 5 min. Figure 1
 95 shows the layout of the experiment.

96 The subject had to look at the fixed cross during the session.
 97 There were no blinking restrictions. The glare was turned on
 98 for 0.5 s at 5 s intervals. The total sequence for each value of
 99 background luminance (0.1, 0.2, and 0.5 cd/m²) had 30
 100 flashes. In this study, we follow the standard practice of spec-
 101 ifying stimulus intensities by photopic luminance. We even in-
 102 cluded light levels in the mesopic range.

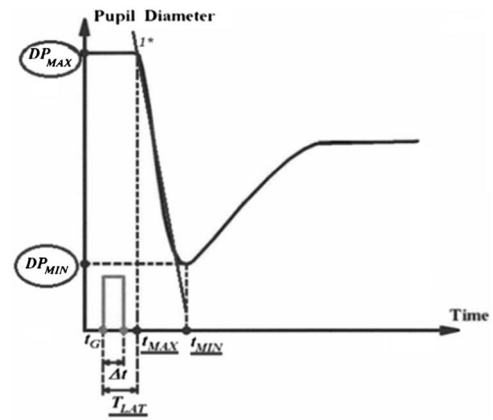
103 The camera systems registered the changes in the pupil
 104 diameter with a frequency of 30 Hz. Figure 2 shows a typical
 105 temporal reply of the pupil size to a transient glare. This is
 106 shown for each period as well as the magnitudes that are
 107 determined.

108 The pupil diameter is represented as a function of time
 109 (units are arbitrary).

- 110 **DP** diameter of the pupil that corresponds to the
 111 generic time t .
 112 **DP_{MAX}** maximum diameter of the pupil before the
 113 constriction.
 114 **t_{MAX}** initial time immediately before the contraction of
 115 the pupil starts.
 116



F1:1 **Fig. 1.** Experimental setup.



F2:1 **Fig. 2.** Pupil light reflex of a transient glare.

- DP_{MIN}** minimum diameter of the pupil on contracting. 117
t_{MIN} time at which the maximum constriction of the 118
 pupil occurs. 119
t_G time at which the glare turns on. 120
Δt time interval during which the glare is on. 121

122
 123 Furthermore, latency time (T_{LAT}) is calculated from these
 124 parameters. Latency time is the interval that occurs between the
 125 start of the glare and the moment when the pupil constriction
 126 begins. The velocity of fall of the pupil diameter also is calcu-
 127 lated from the abovementioned parameters (V_{FALL}):

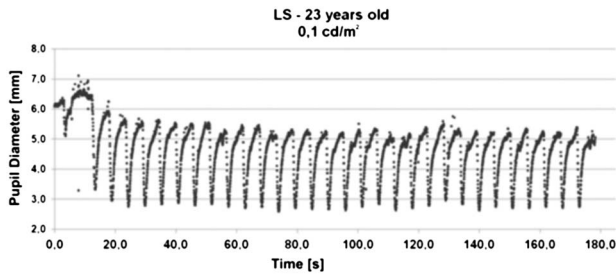
$$T_{LAT} = t_{MAX} - t_G, \quad (1)$$

$$V_{FALL} = \frac{DP_{MAX} - DP_{MIN}}{t_{MAX} - t_{MIN}}. \quad (2)$$

128 Twenty subjects were split into two groups. One group was
 129 made up of 10 adults aged 22 to 30 years old (mean age: 26.1
 130 years old; SD: 2.6 years) and is referred to as the “Young”
 131 group. The other group consisted of 10 adults aged from 51
 132 to 59 years old (mean age: 53.4 years old; SD: 3.2 years) and
 133 is referred to as “Older Adults.” Both groups consisted of four
 134 women and six men. During this experiment, no refractive
 135 correction was used. The criterion for inclusion was the absence
 136 of visual illnesses or deficiencies.

137 3. RESULTS

138 For each subject and for each adaptation luminance, the pupil
 139 diameter was registered during the sequence of 30 glare flashes.
 140 Figure 3 shows an example of the register carried out for an
 141 observer and for a value of adaptation luminance. For each
 142 period of a register, we determined the values of the maximum
 143 diameter of the pupil as the mean of register values during
 144 latency time. We also extracted the minimum value, which was
 145 expressed in millimeters. The latency time was expressed in mil-
 146 liseconds, and the velocity of fall of the pupil diameter was
 147 expressed in millimeters per second.



F3:1 **Fig. 3.** Pupil diameter as a function of time for observer LS (23
F3:2 years old) and for 0.1 cd/m².

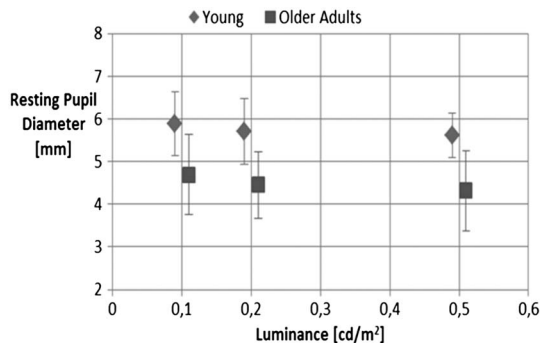
148 **A. Resting Pupil Diameter (DP_{MAX0})**

149 The initial pupil diameter for all subjects was determined as the
150 **3** mean of those obtained before the first flash. These were
151 obtained in steady conditions of adaptation for each adaptation
152 luminance presented in the display (0.1, 0.2, and 0.5 cd/m²).
153 The mean values of DP_{MAX0} and their standard deviations for
154 each adaptation luminance are separated by age group and are
155 shown in Fig. 4. Young and older adult data have been
156 displaced in the horizontal axis in order to better differentiate
157 between the two data sets.

158 An ANOVA shows that the effect of background luminance
159 on the pupil diameter is not statistically significant ($F_{2,54} =$
160 $0.75, p = 0.4768$). This could be due to the small range of
161 luminance considered (only a part of the mesopic range). On
162 the other hand, the effect of age on the pupil diameter is statistically
163 significant. For example, resting pupil diameter decreases with
164 age ($F_{1,54} = 0.98, p < 0.0001$). This phenomenon
165 is well known and could be explained by senile miosis [12].

166 **B. Latency Time (T_{lat})**

167 The latency time was calculated for each subject, for each adap-
168 tation condition, and for each pulse of glare. This means that
169 we obtained 1800 values. Doing a multilevel analysis, we found
170 no differences regarding the age ($z = 0.92; p = 0.356$) nor the
171 repetitions of glare flashes ($z = -1.02; p = 0.307$). The back-
172 ground luminance was the only significant variable affecting
173 latency time ($p = 0.001$). Due to these results, we applied a
174 Tukey test. We considered the mean latency time for each
175 background luminance (Fig. 5), and we found the effect of



F4:1 **Fig. 4.** Mean resting pupil diameter (DP_{MAX0}) as a function of the
F4:2 background luminance for young and older adults. Each error bar
F4:3 corresponds to mean square error.

the adaptation luminance is not significant. This is probably
because of the small range considered for the continuous
variable as well as the remarkable variability introduced by
the subject (34%).

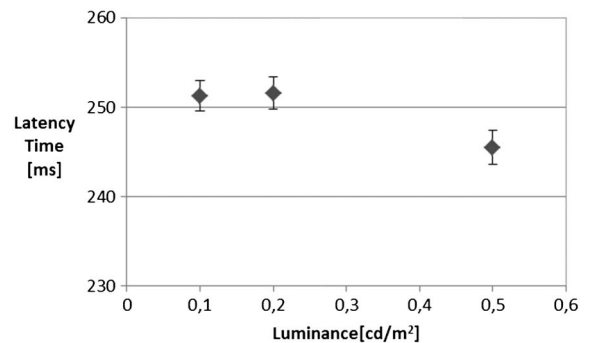
C. Velocity of Fall

The velocity of fall of the pupil diameter is the speed at which
the pupil is reduced when it responds to the glare. Using multi-
level analysis, we obtained that the only significant effect
produced by age is ($z = -3.74; p < 0.001$). The variability be-
tween subjects is 58%. Because we did not find dependence on
time or on luminance, we calculated the mean velocity of fall
for each age group (Fig. 6) to quantify the difference due to age.

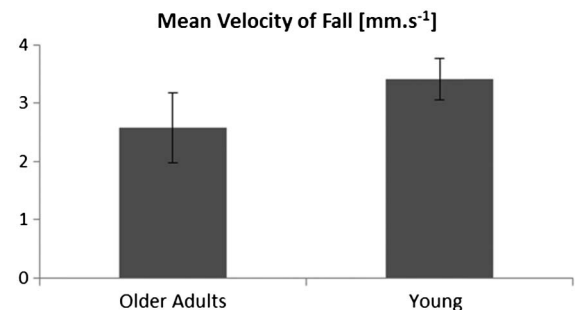
If we consider Eq. (2) for this computation, it is possible to
explain the difference between older adults and young adults by
looking at the smaller differences between DP_{MAX} and DP_{MIN}
in older adults. These differences are due to senile miosis, while
the denominator remains constant.

D. Maximum Pupil Diameter

We will analyze the maximum for each PLR because it will give
us the measure of the dynamics of the process. It also will lead
us to answering whether or not there is a lower value after the
repeating process. Figure 7 shows the parameter DP_{MAX} for
each subject and for each luminance level over time. The differ-
ent curves of DP_{MAX} for each adaptation luminance can be
seen (inside each plot). The different curves of DP_{MAX} for the
different ages can be seen (between columns). DP_{MAX} has, in



F5:1 **Fig. 5.** Mean latency time for the three background luminances
F5:2 considered. Each error bar corresponds to standard deviation.



F6:1 **Fig. 6.** Mean of velocity of fall for each age group. Each error bar
F6:2 corresponds to standard deviation.

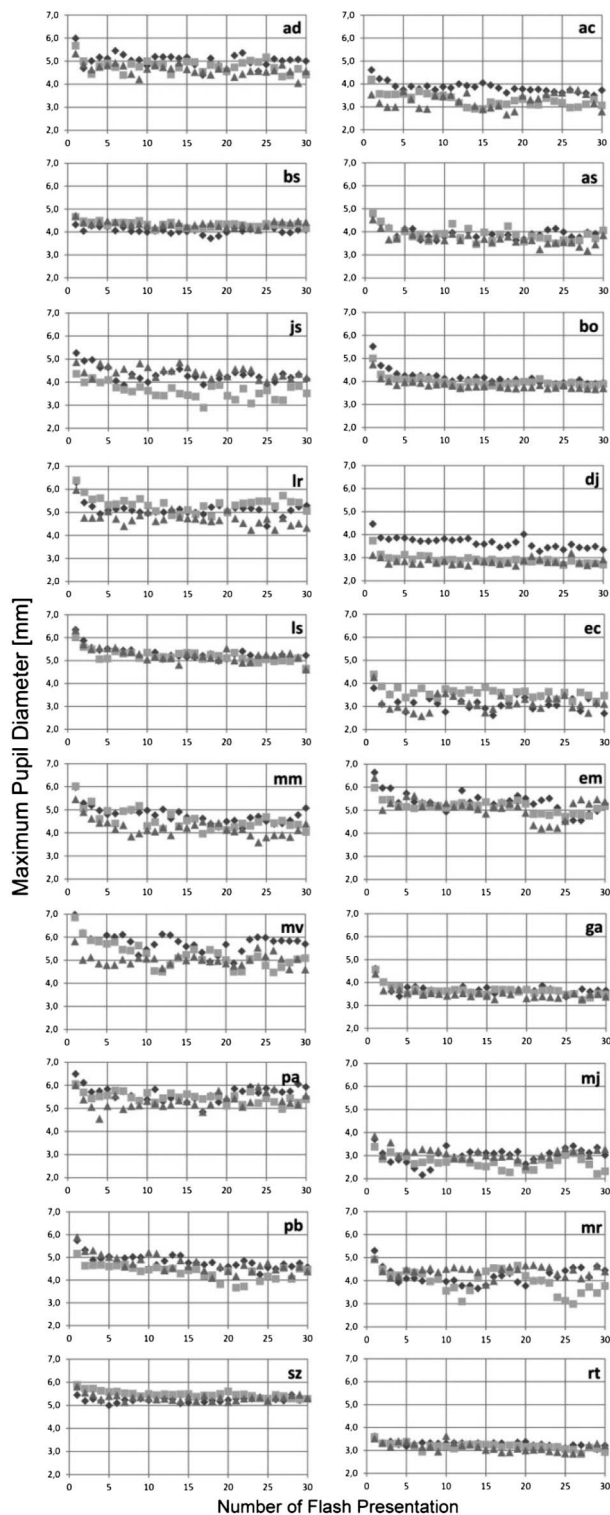


Fig. 7. Sequence of the maximum pupil diameter for each subject for the three values of the background luminance: Young group (left) and Older Adult group (right). (◆) 0.1 cd/m², (■) 0.2 cd/m², and (▲) 0.5 cd/m².

general, higher values with lower dispersion for young subjects than for older ones. Also, it is interesting to note the presence of a pattern of behavior that is repeated in the two age groups: the

maximum pupil diameter reduces following approximately an exponential function, and the intercept depends on the subject.

In this longitudinal study, we proposed a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) to consider the absence of independence among the DP_{MAX} values over time. The study includes the influence of age and luminance in this trend as well as the variation due to subjects. The GLMM is an extension of generalized linear models obtained by introducing random effects in the model. The random effects account for correlation between repeated measurements within each subject and the variation between subjects. In a GLMM, it is assumed that the correlation between repeated observations comes from each subject because they share the same random effect (subject). However, they are assumed to be conditionally independent given the random effect. In this sense, the GLMM proposed model considers two levels of variation: the number of flash presentations and the subject, along with two more factors: age and luminance. It also assumes a random effect due to the subject and an exponential shape due to the response on the number of flash presentation of each subject accounting for age and luminance level (the variable is normalized for each subject, with his resting pupil diameter DP_{MAX0}).

This analysis shows that the fixed effects—luminance, age, and number of flash presentation—are all statistically significant (luminance 0.2 cd/m² $t = 9.19$; luminance 0.5 cd/m² $t = 11.39$; age $t = 3.75$; flash $t = 15.1$; $p < 0.0002$). If we consider the base category as young for age, we find that an individual aged between 50 and 60 years will have on average a DP_{MAX} 27% lower than that of a subject of 20 to 30 years for the same luminance and number of flashes. If we consider the base category for luminance as 0.1 cd/m², on average the value of DP_{MAX} for luminance 0.5 cd/m² will be 4% lower than for the luminance of 0.1 cd/m². This is similar for background luminance 0.5 cd/m² and 0.1 cd/m². The value on mean DP_{MAX} decreases when the number of flashes grows.

Figure 8 shows the fitted DP_{MAX} on the observed trajectories by age and level of luminance equal to 0.1 cd/m², 0.2 cd/m², and 0.5 cd/m². The DP_{MAX} fitted follows an exponential shape and is lower for adults along all the number of flashes.

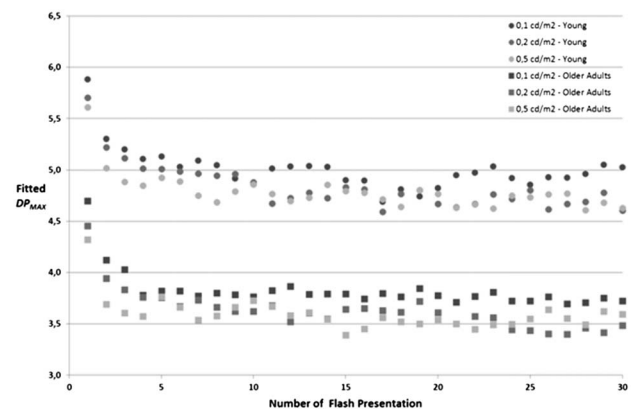


Fig. 8. Fitted maximum pupil diameter for each age group for the three values of the background luminance 0.1 cd/m², 0.2 cd/m², and 0.5 cd/m².

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F8:1
F8:2
F8:3

245 The DP_{MAX} fitted for the flash presentations number 1, 15,
 246 and 30 for each age group and each luminance level are shown
 247 in Table 1. The DP_{MAX} average decreases approximately 5%
 248 (between 0.1 and 0.5 cd/m^2) luminance levels in the youth
 249 group and 4% in the group of older adults. Within the younger
 250 group, the mean DP_{MAX} decreases between 9% and 10% be-
 251 tween the first flash and the last. Within the group of adults,
 252 this percentage is equal to 7%. At the first flash in the group of
 253 adults, the mean DP_{MAX} is approximately 28% lower than
 254 the young group for three luminance levels. For the last flash
 255 (number 30), the percentages are equal to 27% (luminance
 256 0.1 cd/m^2), 26% (luminance 0.2 cd/m^2), and 25% (lumi-
 257 nance 0.5 cd/m^2). In the same table, the average resting pupil
 258 diameter was included for each age and adaptation luminance.

259 According to the result of the Shapiro–Wilk test,
 260 $p = 0.889$, it can be concluded that the random effects follow
 261 a normal distribution and the residuals are randomly distrib-
 262 uted around zero.

263 **E. Retinal Illuminance**

264 Retinal illuminance is a measure of luminous radiation that
 265 reaches the retina and is calculated as the following [3]:

$$E_r = 0.0036 \cdot L \cdot S_p \cdot \tau. \quad (3)$$

266 In Eq. (3), L is the luminance of adaptation expressed in
 267 cd/m^2 , S_p is the area of the pupil in mm^2 and τ is the trans-
 268 mittance of the ocular media. Given that the area of the pupil is
 269 a function of its diameter (DP), L is a constant, and τ depends
 270 on the subject, the Eq. (1) is

$$E_r = k \cdot DP^2, \quad (4)$$

271 where k is a constant that depends on the subject.

272 Given that we have already determined the average initial
 273 resting maximum pupil diameter- DP_{MAX0} , and we also have
 274 8 calculated the fitted final value- DP_{MAX30} -(Table 1), for each
 275 age range and for each adaptation luminance (Fig. 4); then
 276 it is possible to calculate the ratio between the final and initial
 277 retinal illuminance. A given proportionality for each age range
 278 and for each adaptation luminance can be considered using the
 279 following equation:

$$\frac{E_{r30}}{E_{r0}} = \left(\frac{DP_{MAX30}}{DP_{MAX0}} \right)^2. \quad (5)$$

280 Results from this calculation are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Adjusted Values of DP_{MAX} [mm] for Glare Flashes Number 1, 15, and 30 and the Mean Resting Pupil Diameter DP_{MAX0} [mm]

Age Group	Luminance [cd/m^2]	DP_{MAX0} [mm]	DP_{MAX1} [mm]	DP_{MAX15} [mm]	DP_{MAX30} [mm]
Youth	0,1	5,88	5,18	4,92	4,67
	0,2	5,71	4,94	4,7	4,47
	0,5	5,61	4,89	4,65	4,43
Older Adults	0,1	4,7	3,7	3,56	3,43
	0,2	4,45	3,57	3,45	3,32
	0,5	4,32	3,54	3,42	3,3

Table 2. Ratio of Retinal Illuminance for Each Age Group with Corresponding Background Luminance

Groups	Background Luminance [cd/m^2]	$\frac{E_{r30}}{E_{r0}}$ %	Average $(1 - \frac{E_{r30}}{E_{r0}})$ %
Youth	0,1	63	38
	0,2	61	
	0,5	62	
Older Adults	0,1	53	44
	0,2	56	
	0,5	58	

281 One can observe that in both age groups there is a reduction
 282 of retinal luminance, and on average a younger subject received
 283 a 38% less retinal illuminance after 30 glare flashes. This value
 284 worsens to 44% for an older adult.

285 **4. DISCUSSION**

286 The most important conclusion in this paper is that the peri-
 287 odic presence (0.5 s at 5 s intervals) of a glare source (60 lux at
 288 10° from the line of sight) produces a pupil size decrease over
 289 time. This tendency varies according to the range of ages
 290 considered, the background luminances, and the subjects.
 291 This leads to a reduced retinal illuminance. The mean reduc-
 292 tion is 38% for the younger group and 44% for the older
 293 adults.

294 We also observed that the chosen mesopic adaptation,
 295 which was the resting pupil diameter measured for the older
 296 adults (mean age 53.4 years old), is smaller than the value cor-
 297 responding to the referred group of young subjects (mean age
 298 26.1 years old). The variation between maximum and mini-
 299 mum for the young group is from 4.77 to 6.29 mm and for
 300 the older adults is from 3.24 to 5.14 mm-, with $p < 0.001$ 9
 301 ($F = 36, 08$). Our results about resting pupil diameter are con-
 302 sistent with those obtained by Bitsios, Prettyman, and Szabadi
 303 [13], who considered three adaptation luminance level—one
 304 scotopic and two photopic—and also found a difference be-
 305 tween young people (mean age 19.5 years old) and older adults
 306 (mean age 69 years old). Our mean resting pupil diameters ob-
 307 tained under mesopic condition are somewhat larger than those
 308 obtained in photopic conditions, although they are much lower
 309 than o get in the darkness. Winn *et al.* [12] also studied the 10
 310 changes that take place in the pupil according to different ages.
 311 The authors used a group of subjects whose ages ranged from
 312 17 to 83 years old, along with several photopic adaptation lu-
 313 minances. The aforementioned authors concluded that, under
 314 these conditions, the pupil diminishes linearly with age. These
 315 results also confirm the previous findings of Feinberg and
 316 Podolak [15]. In our experiment, the adaptation luminance
 317 does not affect the resting pupil diameter ($p = 0.260$;
 318 $F = 1, 38$). This is probably because the three values are within
 319 the low mesopic range [16].

320 We compared our resting pupil diameter data with the
 321 results of applying Watson and Yellot’s model [17] and used
 322 our experimental conditions (luminance, age, size of the field,
 323 and binocular vision). We found that the remarkable
 324 differences may be due to the extrapolation of the model to
 325 mesopic levels. On the contrary, if we consider the Moon

Table 3. Resting Pupil Diameter Data for Young and Older Adults (Columns 2 and 4, Respectively), Pupil Diameter Computed According to Moon and Spencer Model (Column 3) and with the Age Correction Purpose for Watson and Yellot (Column 5)

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Background Luminance [cd/m ²]	DP [mm]			DP [mm]
	Young	Moon and Spencer Model	Older Adults	Moon and Spencer Model Corrected for Older Adults
0,1	5,88	6,04	4,70	4,92
0,2	5,71	5,72	4,45	4,80
0,5	5,61	5,26	4,32	4,72

T3:2
T3:3
T3:4

and Spencer [18] model [Eq. (5)] based on the background luminance, and if we take into account that adaptation and field size are constant, then we find a good fit of pupillary sizes for the three adaptation luminances in young subjects (Table 3):

$$PD = 4.9 - 3 \tanh(0.4 \log L - 0.00114). \quad (6)$$

As this model does not take into account the age factor, it does not adequately reflect our performance for the older adults. However, if we apply the correction for age proposed by Watson and Yellot [17] [Eq. (5)], a reasonable agreement for this group of subjects is achieved (Table 3):

$$PD(L, a, y, y_0, e) = D_{MS} + (y - y_0) * S(L, a, e). \quad (7)$$

In this equation, D_{MS} is the pupil diameter computed with the Moon and Spencer [18] model, and S is the function proposed by Watson and Yellott [17]. This function describes the change in pupil diameter as a function of luminance (L), area (a), age (y), a reference age (y_0), and number of eyes (e).

In the case of latency time, our results are within the same range found by Kardon and Thompson [1] which was -200 to 450 ms-. Bitsios *et al.* [13] and Feinberg and Podolak [15] also found variations similar to those found in this study and used a large number of glare flashes. Ellis [11], who also worked with sequences of glares, found that latency times decreased when stimulus intensity strongly increased from 500 to 220 ms. As in our case, the glare intensity remained constant, and we varied background luminance only slightly. The latency time variation was not significant.

In reference to the velocity fall, the differences found in the present work between young and older adults are in the same direction as those obtained by Bitsios *et al.* [13]: young people present higher velocities than older adults. However, our data are lower than the data obtained by these authors because we calculate a global velocity fall of the pupil diameter taking into account the slope between the maximum and minimum pupil diameter, and these authors compute the maximum rate of fall, which is the slope at the beginning of the change. This was generally somewhat greater than what we estimated. Ellis's [11] study of the fall velocity did not find differences with the different levels of adaptation in the photopic level. We did

not find differences with the different levels of adaptation either.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The variation of maximum pupil diameter as the flashes follow one another showed nonlinear behavior, and the fit proposed confirmed our hypothesis that the pupil diameter decreases with age, the level of glare received, and the number of flashes. We know this because the result of these variables is statically significant. An individual aged between 50 and 60 years has a mean DP_{MAX} 27% lower than that of a subject of 20 – 30 years for the same luminance and number of flashes. On average, the value of DP_{MAX} for a luminance of 0.5 cd/m² is 4% lower than for 0.1 cd/m². Similarly, for the luminances 0.2 cd/m² and 0.1 cd/m², the value of mean DP_{MAX} decreases when the number of flashes grows. The presence of successive peripheral glare sources in mesopic adaptation conditions reduces the maximum and minimum pupil diameter. Older adults stabilize more quickly, but with a lower value than young subjects. This leads to a bigger reduction of retinal illuminance for the older adults. Latency time is greater for the older adults, which also is the case for fall velocity of pupil diameter.

Funding. Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) (PIP 11220090100308); Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica (ANPCyT) (PICT 1920).

Acknowledgment. We thank volunteer subjects and the Department of Lighting, Light and Vision (FACET-UNT) for the use of its equipment.

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