

The importance of children's vision care

COMMON VISION CONDITIONS IN CHILDREN

Strabismus

Strabismus is a disorder in which the two eyes do not line up in the same direction, and therefore do not look at the same object at the same time. The condition is more commonly known as "cross-eyed". This results in the child using only the better eye to see to avoid double vision.

Symptoms

- One eye focusing straight ahead, while the other eye turns in, out, up or down.
- Depth perception loss
- Double vision
- Vision loss

Treatment

In many instances strabismus can be corrected with appropriate glasses but in some circumstances surgery is required to align the eyes.



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Why is vision so important?

Because 80% of children's learning is done visually. Reading, writing, blackboard work, computers are all hard work if you cannot see clearly. It stands to reason that having clear comfortable vision is necessary for a child to learn successfully. So many of the day to day learning tasks at school require seeing quickly and using visual information.

Is it OK so long as the child can see the whiteboard?

No, not necessarily. The whiteboard may still look clear and sharp to a child who is having problems with close vision tasks and the child that doesn't see the blackboard clearly may not even think to complain because it has always looked that way.

Unfortunately, a simple distance vision check for the whiteboard does not detect a variety of other problems which affect reading and focus.

What about eye coordination skills?

Clear eyesight helps in learning tasks but for close vision work, and particularly reading, other visual skills are needed. Children must have a variety of scanning, focussing, and visual coordination skills for learning and for understanding print. If these skills have not developed well, learning is stressful and difficult.



Are learning difficulties and poor vision related?

Many children who have learning difficulties, especially with reading, in fact have focussing errors or poor eye muscle coordination, which creates stress or fatigue with close work. Children with these vision-related learning problems often have excellent distance eyesight. Consequently, their near vision problems, which are more likely to affect learning, will often go undetected as standard school screening only tests the clarity of distance vision.

What can parents and caregivers do?

Parents, caregivers, and teachers should consider undetected visual problems as a contributing factor if learning is not keeping pace with other indicators of ability and intelligence. This is particularly so if symptoms of visual stress are present. A full and thorough eye examination is the most effective way of eliminating the possibility of a vision problem.

Symptoms which may indicate a child is having vision problems:

- Headaches
- Rubbing eyes
- Shutting one eye when reading
- Burning or itchy eyes
- Poor concentration
- Losing place when copying
- Getting tired after close work
- Avoiding close work
- Reversing letters or omitting short words

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Amblyopia

Amblyopia, or "lazy eye," is the loss of one eye's ability to see details. It is the most common cause of vision problems in children. Amblyopia occurs when the nerve pathway from one eye to the brain does not develop during childhood. This occurs because the abnormal eye sends a blurred image or the wrong image to the brain. This confuses the brain, and the brain may learn to ignore the image from the weaker eye. The only way to diagnose a lazy eye is with a full eye examination. However, you should consult with your Visique optometrist if you notice any of the following symptoms.

Symptoms

- Eyes that turn in or out
- Eyes that do not appear to work together
- Inability to judge depth correctly
- Poor vision in one eye

Treatment

Glasses are often the first treatment of a lazy eye, and the child is required to wear them full time. A patch can be put over the stronger eye, which forces the brain to respond to the weaker eye. This makes the weaker eye become stronger. Patches may be used all day or part of the day, depending on the child's age and vision.