

Children's Eye Health



It is particularly important that children are taken to have their eyes tested. It is recommended that children be taken for an eye examination by the age of three and every two years after this (unless your optometrist advises otherwise).

Studies have shown that undetected eye conditions can have serious effects on children's educational performance. When a child's visual faculties aren't working properly, learning can suffer. Put more simply, if children have difficulties seeing what's on the board or computer screen, they're far more likely than other children to become frustrated with the whole learning process and consequently to under-perform. In recent research carried out by Professor David Thomson of City University, in conjunction with Guide Dogs for the Blind, 12 per cent of children were found to have undetected visual problems. A further 43 per cent had not had an eye examination for more than two years. I have decided that in order to support Prof Thompson and offer our patients the best possible care I would implement and use his computer programmes and visual software for diagnosis.

In December 2002 research undertaken by Taylor Nelson for the Guide Dogs for the Blind showed that 34 per cent of parents with five to sixteen-year-olds had not had their child's eyes tested in the previous five years. Again, a simple eye test is all that's needed to pick these up and help children to fulfil their academic potential.

Even if a child isn't experiencing problems at school, there are still good reasons to go for an eye test. Some common childhood eye conditions, such as amblyopia and strabismus, are treatable if diagnosed at an early age. Moreover, starting regular eye tests early on establishes a good pattern for later life. What's more, in the UK, children are entitled to free eye tests on the NHS. Find out more about who is eligible for a free eye tests

Top ten eye care tips for children

1. It is never too soon to take your child for an eye examination, as optometrists can examine children's eyes even if they are unable to read letters. You should aim to take children for their first eye examination at least by the time they are three years old, especially if there is a family history of wearing glasses.
2. Children should have eye examinations at least once every two years, and more often, as advised by their optometrist, if they have an existing eye condition. Eye tests for children under 16 are free. It is important to know that eye screening children is no longer carried out by the health visitor or at school. Even if this check has been done in the past it is not as detailed as the eye examination carried out by an optometrist.

3. Always make sure there is plenty of light when your child is doing their homework so they do not strain their eyes to see. A desk lamp is very useful. Don't let them read in bed with a torch or with low light levels.

4. Children of any age who are underachieving at school should have an eye examination. Poor vision is very likely to cause problems with reading and writing.

5. If you suspect that your child has a colour vision problem or if there is a family history of colour vision problems then arrange an eye examination with your local optometrist. There is no cure for colour vision deficiency but at least teachers can be made aware of this problem and avoid using certain colours in their teaching.



6. Always protect your child's sight in the sun. There is increasing evidence to suggest that over-exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays (UV) can contribute to the development of cataracts, age-related macular degeneration and ocular melanoma (eye cancer). On average, people receive 50% of their lifetime sun exposure before they are 18 years old. The correct sunglasses for kids are vitally important just as you protect their skin from burning. Just think how much more sensitive the eyes are!

7. Make sure they eat their greens. Eating certain fruit and vegetables which contain substances called lutein and zeaxanthin could help protect against some eye conditions, in particular cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in this country. In particular ensure they eat plenty of broccoli, oranges, peas, kiwi fruits, mangoes, sweetcorn, grapes, and of course spinach!

8. If your child is computer crazy or a bookworm ensure they take regular breaks from such close work. Although there is no conclusive evidence to suggest either activity causes visual problems they can certainly lead to tired, red and sore eyes.

9. Children who rub their eyes a lot or who complain of tired eyes and frequent headaches should have an eye examination. Poor vision is a common cause of sore eyes and headaches.

10. When your child is playing certain sports, such as badminton or squash, get them to wear protective goggles so they don't risk a dangerous eye injury. These can be obtained from your optometrist and can even have a prescription built in.

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