Children’s Eye Health

Children’s Eye Health – What you should know

Did you know that 80% of what kids learn in school is learned visually?

Good vision care is essential to every child’s development. An eye exam can assure parents that their child has the visual “tools” necessary to succeed in the classroom.

Periodic comprehensive eye exams, beyond basic school screenings, provide a baseline for your child’s visual health and can often detect problems that may be misdiagnosed as learning or behavioral disorders. Undiagnosed vision problems can affect performance in school and sports, and cause your child to struggle academically and socially.

Routine eye exams for children can also detect a number of vision problems, from vision impairment — which can be treated with eyeglasses or contact lenses – to more serious disorders that can have a long-term impact on health and self-esteem. Experts recommend a comprehensive eye exam by age one to rule out serious conditions such as amblyopia and strabismus (disorders where the eyes do not track properly, commonly called lazy eye and crossed eyes) and ocular cancers that become present early in life. Left untreated, these conditions can interfere with your child’s vision development and overall health.

Many eye conditions (like lazy eye, crossed eyes, nearsightedness and color vision defects) are inherited, so it is important for the doctor to know about family members who have had eye problems. Tell the doctor if the child has brothers or sisters, older or younger, and whether or not they have eye problems.

Tell the doctor all of your child’s medical history, from the time the child was born. Prenatal and childbirth complications, prematurity and low birth weight have been linked to eye disease. Explain any medical problems, including allergies, the child has had or is experiencing now, and bring a list of current medications, as they can affect the visual system.
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Look for these potential signs of vision problems in your child:

- Loses place while reading
- Holds reading material closer than normal
- Avoids close work
- Tends to rub eyes
- Has headaches
- Turns or tilts head
- Makes frequent reversals when reading or writing
- Uses finger to maintain place when reading
- Omits or confuses small words when reading
- Consistently performs below potential
- Squints while reading or watching television

Quick fact:
A school’s or pediatrician’s vision screening does not address all of the same issues that a comprehensive eye examination does.

Source: http://www.aoa.org/childrens-vision.xml

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Eye Exams vs. Vision Screenings

Good vision is essential to every child’s development. An eye exam can assure parents that their child has the visual “tools” necessary to succeed in the classroom. Periodic comprehensive eye exams, beyond basic school screenings, provide a baseline for your child’s visual health and can often detect problems that may be misdiagnosed as learning or behavioral disorders.

Comprehensive eye exams are especially important for children because 80 percent of all learning is a result of the visual process. A vision screening by the pediatrician or the school nurse is not a comprehensive exam. Parents of children who pass a vision screening may incorrectly assume that their children do not require professional care.

The National Institutes of Health found that vision screenings catch only 37 to 68 percent of children with poor vision. Eye exams are just as important to young children as dental visits and annual physicals.

Undiagnosed vision problems can affect performance in school and sports, and cause your child to struggle academically and socially. Routine eye exams for children can also detect a number of vision problems, from vision impairment – which can be treated with eyeglasses or contact lenses – to serious disorders that can have a long-term impact on health and self-esteem. Experts recommend a comprehensive eye exam by age one to rule out serious eye conditions that, if left untreated, can interfere with your child’s vision development and overall health.

Keeping an Eye Out for Vision Problems

It can be difficult to spot a child’s vision problem because children do not know how they are supposed to see. If they see everything in the world as a blur, they may think everyone sees the world the same way. It’s also important to remember that a child can have 20/20 vision, but still not have a perfectly performing visual system. There may be problems with amblyopia (lazy eye), strabismus (crossed eyes), eye coordination, depth perception, focusing or color vision – any one of which can interfere with information processing. If a child is having a problem with their eyes, they may experience the following symptoms:

- Rubbing eyes or red, sore, itchy eyes
- Squinting
- Eyestrain
- Poor eye movement or one eye turning in or out
- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Excessive blinking
- Avoidance of close work or holding reading material close to their eyes
- Headaches
- Reversing letters, numbers or words
- Delayed learning of the alphabet
- Trouble reading or poor reading comprehension
- Turning or tilting the head or moving the head excessively while reading
- Poor eye-hand coordination
- Poor performance in school
- Behavior problems

Remember, good vision is more than just seeing something clearly. Vision is a kind of guiding mechanism in growth and development and in navigating daily life. Vision is the ability to take in information through the eyes and then process the information for meaning. There are conditions affecting eyesight that only a comprehensive eye exam can diagnose. Eyecare professionals know how to get the most out of your child’s exam and are able to test for functions that are necessary for growth and learning.
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What to Do When Your Child Gets Pinkeye

Learn how to prevent and treat pinkeye.

If your child comes home from daycare or school with pinkeye (also called conjunctivitis), it shouldn’t come as a surprise. Pinkeye is very contagious in kids and it’s the most common eye infection in the U.S.

Pink eye is an infection of the membrane (the conjunctiva) that covers the white of the eye and the inside of the eyelid. Fortunately, pinkeye is usually more of a bother than a danger.

**Signs of pinkeye**

Although it rarely causes more serious complications, if you think your child has pinkeye, it’s important see a doctor for the right treatment. Symptoms of pinkeye, which may occur in one or both eyes, include:

- Eye redness or irritation
- Tearing
- A discharge from the eye that may make it feel crusty and cause eyelids to stick together, especially when your child first wakes up
- Sensitivity to light
- Swollen eyelids
- Itchiness

You may also notice your child rubbing his or her eyes more than usual.

**What causes pinkeye?**

In kids, pinkeye is most often caused by bacteria or a virus. Viral pinkeye often accompanies a cold. In some cases pinkeye can be a sign of an allergic reaction or exposure to chemical irritants.

**How is pinkeye treated?**

The treatment for pinkeye depends on the cause:

- Your doctor may prescribe antibiotic drops or ointment. This will usually quickly clear a bacterial infection. Antibiotics don’t help viruses, but it’s tricky to tell if it’s a bacteria or virus causing the pinkeye.

Viral pinkeye will clear up on its own in 1 to 2 weeks. To make your child more comfortable, you can apply cool or warm compresses and use artificial tear eye drops.

- For allergy-related pinkeye, your doctor may tell you to use an antihistamine or eye drops to ease irritation, or may prescribe an anti-allergy medication. Avoiding the allergen is the best way to manage allergy-related pinkeye.

Pinkeye caused by bacteria or a virus is highly contagious. Keep your child out of daycare or school until your doctor says it’s OK to return.

**How can you help prevent pinkeye and keep it from spreading?**

The ways to help prevent your child from getting pinkeye are the same as those that help keep an infected child from spreading it. These measures are especially important in a daycare or preschool. In these settings, outbreaks have the potential to take over an entire class.

- Keep your child from touching the affected eye.
- Make sure your child washes his or her hands often and dries them with paper towels.
- Frequently clean objects that children share, such as toys, books, and playground equipment.
- Clean door handles, sink faucets, and other commonly used items too.
- Wipe your child’s eye several times a day with a fresh, clean tissue or washcloth. Use a new tissue for each eye. A washcloth should be washed in hot water and detergent. Wash your hands after touching your child’s eye.
Sunglasses: A Must for Children and Adults

Over-exposure to UV rays is bad for eyes of any age but can be especially harmful for the very young. Learn how to protect your eye health.

Sunglasses aren't just a fashion accessory or reserved only for adults. Wearing sunglasses, from birth through old age, can help save your eyesight.

The lens inside a child’s eye is clear from birth through about age 10. It can’t filter out as much sunlight as an adult lens. That means sun exposure can cause more damage before age 10 than after.

**Early exposure, long-term damage**

Long-term exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays is a big factor in vision loss. Studies indicate that too much sunlight may lead to:

- Cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, which rob adults of eyesight
- Skin cancer around the eyelids
- Benign growths on the eye’s surface that can block vision

There are two types of harmful UV radiation:

- UVA rays can damage the macula, the part of the retina that controls central vision.
- UVB rays affect the front part of the eye – the cornea and lens.

Over-exposure to UVB rays for short periods can lead to corneal sunburn. This can cause pain, a feeling of grit in the eyes, and even short-term vision loss. You can get this kind of exposure at the beach or on a ski slope without proper eye protection. For children, this can cause long-term vision problems.

Bright sun and glare can also cause immediate problems. Bright sunlight interferes with your vision and ability to see clearly. It causes you to squint and makes your eyes water.

Since proper eye protection helps prevent future vision loss, make sure that:

- Your kids wear sunglasses, and they understand why they need them.
- They keep wearing sunglasses into adulthood.
- You wear sunglasses, too. If you set a good example, your children will be more likely to get into the habit of wearing sunglasses as well.

**When to wear sunglasses**

Sunglasses are not just for sunny summer days, when UV rays are at least three times higher than in winter. Reflections from snow, water, sand, or pavement can intensify UV rays to extremely high levels.

Don’t be fooled by a cloudy day. The sun’s rays pass right through the haze and thin clouds. When outside, wear sunglasses. Be sure to wear them in the early afternoon when UV radiation is strongest.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology says you should wear sunglasses when you take part in winter sports. You should also wear them at high altitudes, where UV light is more intense. Keep your sunglasses on outside when you take medications that can increase your sensitivity to sunlight.

**Sunglasses aren't enough:**

- Choose wrap-around sunglasses that block at least 99 percent of UVA and UVB rays.
- Have your child wear a wide-brimmed hat along with sunglasses. The hat will block about half of UV rays and provide extra protection. Even a baseball cap can limit UV rays that hit the eyes from above or around glasses.
- Teach your children to never look directly into or stare at the sun. Looking at the sun for too long, even during an eclipse, can cause permanent blindness.
- Try to keep children out of the sun between 10 am and 4 pm. This is when the sun’s rays are strongest.
- Keep children younger than 6 months old out of direct sunlight. Baby strollers with a canopy or umbrella can help shield them from direct sunlight.
- Use sunscreen whenever you or your child is out in the sun. The rest of your body needs to be shielded from UV rays, too.