

Health Tips for Parents

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Does my child need an eye exam?

Yearly vision screening during a well-child visit is important to check for general eye health, visual acuity, alignment and development.



“Children should be getting examinations to check their ocular health as soon as they are born. Initially, these exams are performed by their pediatrician or primary healthcare provider as a part of their routine well-child visits and are aimed to detect structural abnormalities of the eye or problems with eye alignment,” says Monica Khitri, MD, pediatric ophthalmologist, UCLA Stein Eye Institute.



As children get older, emphasis should be placed on also checking their visual acuity. For most children, this can occur around 3 to 4 years old but, at minimum, should be performed by age 5. This exam can be performed by an ophthalmologist, optometrist, pediatrician or other primary healthcare provider.

Eye Problems and Treatment

Common signs of visual problems include squinting, crossing or drifting out of the

eyes, and difficulty with visual tasks such as reading or drawing. Other signs to look for include tilting the head, frequent eye rubbing, and light sensitivity. Refractive error – or a need for eyeglasses – is one of the most common childhood eye problems. While older children and teenagers often have myopia (nearsightedness), other reasons for children to need eyeglasses and/or contact lenses include hyperopia (farsightedness) and astigmatism.

Other common childhood eye problems include conjunctivitis, styes, blocked tear ducts that cause persistent tearing, and droopiness of the eyelid. More serious eye problems include: amblyopia (weak connections between the eye(s) and the brain), strabismus (misalignment of the eyes), cataracts and glaucoma.

Pediatric ophthalmologists are experienced at treating children with eye problems and can tailor treatment to meet their individual needs, which may include corrective lenses, patching therapy, eyedrops and/or surgery, if needed.

Common Myths

- **Sitting too close to the TV can cause eye problems.** Not true. But watching TV and doing indoor activity instead of being outdoors may cause an increased risk for myopia.
- **If you cross your eyes, they will stay that way.** Not true. However, if the child is consistently crossing one eye and not on purpose, he/she should be evaluated for strabismus.
- **Eating carrots is good for your eyes.** Vitamin A, which is important for eye health, is found in carrots as well as other fruits and vegetables.
- **Wearing eyeglasses too much can make the eyes “dependent” on them.** Eyeglass prescriptions change as children get older due to the growth of the eye, the degree of which is usually related to genetics, not to wearing glasses too often.



Taking care of your vision

“One of the best things parents can do for their child’s eyes is to ensure that they undergo basic vision screening exams at every well-child visit. Also, wearing sunglasses and rimmed hats will protect eyes from harmful UV rays,” advises Dr. Khitri. If you notice any worrisome signs or difficulty seeing in your child, address your concerns with your pediatrician promptly to ensure that an evaluation can be made by your local pediatric eye health provider.