

Elementary School Age Children and Their Vision

Children's vision continues to develop until they are about 8 years old. After that age, eyesight development is complete and it cannot be corrected easily.

Should my child have a vision test?

Children may not know that they have a vision problem. Changes in a child's vision happen very slowly. A child may think that everyone else sees the same way, especially if a child develops nearsightedness (myopia) and faraway objects appear blurry.

Some problems can result in permanent vision damage if they are not corrected early:

- **Crossed eyes** (strabismus) is a condition where the eye muscles point one or both eyes in the wrong direction.
- **Lazy eye** (amblyopia) is a condition where the vision in one eye is weaker than the other eye. The child's brain ignores the weak eye and uses the strong eye to see. If untreated, the child's brain develops a clear picture in the good eye and a blurry picture in the weak eye.

Vision problems often have a family history. If you know of vision problems in your family, your child's eyes should be examined by an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist), especially if you notice any concerns.

What are some vision problems and their symptoms?

Your child should see your family health care provider or eye doctor if you notice any of these signs or symptoms:

- blurred vision;
- headaches;
- red, itchy or watery eyes;
- squinting or rubbing the eyes;
- excessive blinking;
- covering or closing one eye;
- holding objects too close;
- reading items or watching television very closely;
- avoiding activities needing distance vision;
- poor performance in school; or
- lack of coordination or clumsiness in physical activities.

How can I help to prevent eye injuries for my child?

You can prevent eye injuries and increase eye safety for children.

- Teach children to play safely with toys and games.
- Take rest breaks to avoid eye strain while doing close up activities, such as using a computer, playing video games, or watching television. These activities can decrease the natural blink reflex and cause irritated, red, or dry eyes.
- Provide an area for homework that has even lighting and does not have glare or reflections. Children should take regular breaks to rest their eyes when reading.

- Teach children not to walk or run while carrying sharp objects. Objects, such as pencils, keys, umbrellas, scissors, lollipop sticks, uncooked spaghetti, drinking straws, or pieces of wire, can cause an eye injury.
- Teach children to sit at least 3 metres (8 to 10 feet) away from the television screen. Place the television in a spot that reduces glare or use soft lighting.

What about wearing sunglasses and other types of protection?

Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun can cause eye damage, as well as harm the skin.

Sunglasses are recommended for children and adults. To protect eyes, sunglasses should:

- have large lenses and a wraparound design, fully covering the eyes;
- fit well and be comfortable;
- have labels with 99 to 100 per cent UVA and UVB protection; and
- not have cord or string attachments. Cord and string attachments are not recommended due to the risk of strangulation. If a cord or string attachment is used, it should come off easily if pulled.

If your child wears corrective lenses or glasses, make sure they have UV protection.

Hats that shade the face and eyes may provide better sun protection. Hats can be easier for children to keep on than sunglasses. Hats should be worn by children when playing in the sun to prevent sunburn and any harm to their vision.

Could my child be colour blind?

Some children, boys more often than girls, have trouble seeing certain colours. They can see colours, but they may have some trouble identifying certain colours. Some colours can look the same and be harder to tell apart, such as the difference between grey and purple.

Your child can have a simple colour vision test by an eye doctor to check for any concerns. This can help you understand and deal with any problems your child may have in learning situations involving colours.

For More Information

For more information, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #11 Ultraviolet Radiation](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #53a Young Children and Their Vision](#)

For more information on vision screening, contact your local public health unit.

To find an optometrist in your area, contact the BC Association of Optometrists at 604-737-9907 or toll-free 1-888-393-2226, or visit www.optometrists.bc.ca.

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/ or your local public health unit.

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