

YOUR CHILD'S EYESIGHT

Your child's eyesight is precious. Poor vision can seriously hamper a child's ability to learn and develop and most worryingly, if left untreated could lead to irreversible sight problems.

Eye Health UK recommends children have an eye examination at least once every two years. Vision screening is particularly important in the early years and special tests have been devised for optometrists to examine very young children.

Parents shouldn't rely on their children to complain about problems with their sight as a child can often live with poor vision because they don't know what good vision looks like!

Over recent years vision screening in schools has diminished however, children's eye care is free at all high street opticians as it is paid for by the NHS.

Early eyesight

All babies are born with long-sighted vision and the ability to focus on fine detail is acquired during its early months. The eyes are not fully developed at birth and vision needs to be stimulated in order for it to develop correctly - it's quite common for babies' eyes to seem a little clumsy as visual co-ordination begins to develop.

It's never too early to take your baby for an eye examination. Any defect - such as a squint - can cause problems later on unless treated at an early age. A child's vision is fully developed by the age of eight.

Vision screening checks are often carried out by doctors, orthoptists, health visitors and in schools, but these are not as comprehensive as a full eye examination carried out by an optometrist.

It's a common misconception that children's eyesight can not be accurately checked until they can read, in fact a child's eyes can be tested from birth.

As a child grows and his communication skills improve more detailed tests are possible. 3-D vision, for example, can be tested with pictures of familiar objects.

Ensure good vision

Just as children visit the dentist at regular intervals it's important to make regular visits to the family opticians.

Many eyesight defects, such as long- or short-sightedness, astigmatism or squint can be inherited, so be sure to tell your optometrist if there is a family history of any of these.



Sometimes parents believe that they see a squint in their child, when it's simply a fold of skin which will disappear as the nose and face develop. Conversely, sometimes eyes can appear to be straight when a squint really is present. Only a full eye exam can detect this type of condition.

It's often difficult to tell if your child is having problems with their eyes but some tell-tale signs that there could be something wrong include struggling to recognise colours and shapes; not showing any interest in learning to read; complaining about headaches and sitting very close to the TV.

If you recognise any of these symptoms you should arrange for your child to have an eye examination.

What if your child needs glasses?

Popular children's characters like Harry Potter and pop stars such as Justin Bieber, have made wearing glasses cool.

There's a wide range of frames available for children that are comfortable, practical and, most importantly, cool! They are well designed with features such as adjustable nose pads and saddle bridges for small noses and spring hinges and flexible memory metal for durability and comfort.



Plastic and polycarbonate lenses are recommended for children as they are light and safe and, can be treated with anti-scratch coatings for extra durability!

Can children wear contact lenses?

Yes. It's now common for children from 10 years of age, or even younger if they're keen and grown up enough, to start wearing contact lenses. The average age for children being first fitted contact lenses is 13 years.

What is available under the NHS?

All children under 16 years and children under 19 years still in full time education are entitled to regular eye tests paid for by the NHS. Only a qualified practitioner - an optometrist or dispensing optician registered with the General Optical Council, or a registered medical practitioner is permitted by law to supply children's spectacles.

Following an eye examination parents / carers are entitled to a voucher towards the cost of any glasses or contact lenses that may be prescribed. The value of the voucher is determined by the prescription needed. Most opticians offer a range of good quality, low cost frames for children.

Surprising treatment

If your child is diagnosed with a vision problem you may be surprised by the treatment prescribed as limited use of computer and 3D games can actually help improve a child's vision!

Electronic games encourage repetitive eye movements that help train the eye to focus, whilst viewing 3D media can help improve binocular vision by encouraging the eyes to work together as a team.

UV protection

According to the World Health Organisation 80 per cent of a lifetime's UV is absorbed into the eye by the time a child reaches the age of 18 so it is vital that you keep your child's eyes protected from the sun's UV rays to help prevent eye disease in later life. Sunglasses or UV protective lenses should be worn whenever the UV Index reaches three or more.

Leaflet published Eye Health UK (charity number 1086146)
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