



*Daniel Levy, O.D.*

## Common Childhood Vision Problems

By Daniel Levy, O.D.

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**Q:** What are the most common vision problems in school-age children?

**A:** The most common vision problems in school-age children are that they're having a hard time seeing the blackboard (they're nearsighted) or they're having a hard time reading up close (they're farsighted). In some cases children have difficulty focusing, which we call an accommodative insufficiency.

We also see children with amblyopia, a vision development disorder caused by one eye not being able to see as well as the other. The brain sees two different pictures that it can't combine in a meaningful way, so it ignores the image from the weaker eye and chooses to interpret only the image sent by the stronger eye. The result is that the eye that isn't seeing well will not develop properly.

If we can diagnose amblyopia early enough and correct the eye's refractive state by prescribing a pair of glasses,

we may be able to rectify this developmental vision problem.

**Q:** What vision problems most affect pre-schoolers?

**A:** More common in preschoolers is a problem with eye muscles that prevents proper alignment and focus. The inability to focus both eyes in the same direction accurately, which makes the eye appear lazy, is called strabismus. If it is not treated, strabismus can cause amblyopia.

We see children with eyes turned in, eyes turned out, one eye in, one eye out, one eye higher than the other. Any of these scenarios may inhibit development of the visual pathway if it's not addressed and corrected at an early stage.

We recommend that children get their first comprehensive eye exam when starting school, even if they don't show any outward signs that they're not seeing well. A child may not complain about poor vision, but at such a young age they may not realize that they're not seeing well at distance or up close, or that their eyes are not working in conjunction with each other.

Of course, if a child does complain or show signs of poor vision, then an earlier trip to the eye care professional for a comprehensive exam is recommended.

**Q:** How can parents tell if their child has a vision disorder?

**A:** Here are some signs that parents should look for:

- Crawling incorrectly.
- Bumping into furniture or walls.
- Losing balance when standing up from a sitting position.
- Holding objects close to their nose to see.
- Rubbing eyes a lot.
- Squinting frequently.
- Using only one eye and covering the other.
- Not focusing the eyes together; e.g., one eye is looking left and the other is looking right, or one eye is looking up and the other is looking down.

These are some of the most apparent signs. They are indicators that mommy and daddy may pick out even before the child is in school that would dictate having a comprehensive eye exam at a very young age. A lot of times parents will go to the pediatrician first, and the pediatrician will recommend an eye care professional for a full comprehensive eye exam.

**Q:** What can parents do to help keep their children's eyes healthy?

**A:** Stay informed. Listen to the recommendations of their child's pediatrician and eye care professional as to what their child needs. If a child needs glasses just for the blackboard, then they should wear them only to see the blackboard, not to do homework, play video games or work on the computer. If the doctor recommends they wear them for sports, they should wear them only for sports. If a child should be wearing glasses for reading up close, writing, computer use and homework, then they shouldn't be wearing them at the movies or while wrestling with their friends.

Parents' biggest responsibility is compliance with the doctors' recommendations for their child. The doctor may find that the child's vision is poor and that glasses need to be worn all the time. It's the parents' responsibility to make sure the child complies. It's not going to work if a prescribed pair of glasses are on the desk at home—not making it to the classroom—and the child is still squinting and getting eyestrain.

Good nutrition, lots of exercise and having a well-balanced lifestyle certainly help children's eyes stay healthy. Achieving a balance in daily activities can also protect children from eye strain.

