



# Vision Trouble in Children

Children are great about telling parents when something might be troubling them. You probably know your child's communication patterns well enough to know when a serious problem exists. Don't let signs of vision problems go untreated.

Vision problems can be spotted in children as young as three months old. At this stage of development, a child should be able to follow an object with his eyes. If you notice he has trouble maintaining focus, be sure to dis-

cuss it with your pediatrician.

## **VISUAL SIGNS THAT COULD MEAN TROUBLE**

Sometimes signs of vision problems can be easily spotted by inspecting your child's eyes. The American Academy

of Pediatrics recommends alerting your pediatrician if you notice any of the following symptoms in your child:

- White or grayish-white color in the pupil;
- Pus or crust in either eye, or constant watering;
- Drooping eyelids or eyes that appear overly sensitive to light; and
- Redness in either eye that doesn't go away in a few days.

## **BEHAVIORAL SIGNS TO NOTICE**

When your child reaches preschool age, she will begin

relying more on her vision to accelerate her academic development. Activities such as stacking blocks, coloring, using scissors and even assembling puzzles help improve the eye-to-brain relationship.

Tuning these fine motor skills assist with learning to read and write.

However, if a child is experiencing troubles with his vision, he likely will struggle to keep up with the rest of the class. According to the American Optometric Association, you might notice

some warning signs that must be brought to a pediatrician's attention.

Witnessing your child sitting too close to the television or holding books and magazines too close to their faces can reveal a struggle with vision.

If a child displays a short attention span or avoids fun activities, such as coloring or puzzles, it is a sign of vision and focus problems. Children who frequently rub their eyes or complain of itchiness should see an eye doctor, so be aware of your child's daily activities and behaviors.

# Importance of Eye Exams

If visiting the optometrist is not a part of your preventative health routine, you risk developing serious vision problems that otherwise could have been treated.

Signs and symptoms are generally so subtle you won't even notice they are present until it is too late.

Scheduling an appointment with your local optometrist allows him to spot problems early and determine the best strategy to maintain your vision. Through observation and easy-to-perform testing, it's easy to learn the integrity of your eye health.

## U.S. VISION STATISTICS

According to studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only half of the estimated 61 million adults in the United States classified as being at high risk for serious vision loss visited an eye doctor in the past 12 months.

Here are more unsettling facts revealed by the study, which should urge you to get on top of your vision health:

- 3.4 million Americans age 40 and older are either blind or visually impaired;
- 20.5 million Americans age 40 and older have a cata-



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ract; and

- 5.9 percent of Americans age 20 and older have some form of visual impairment, most of which can be corrected.

## WHAT HAPPENS AT AN EYE EXAM

The process of preparing for an eye examination is simple and painless. A division of the College of Optometrists, Look After Your Eyes, has laid

out how you can prepare:

**Getting to know your optometrist:** If you are a new patient, it is important to answer the questions asked by your optometrist honestly. By understanding family history, general health and medications you take, your doctor will have a good grip on conditions to expect and how to correct them.

**The exam:** An important tool your optometrist will use

is called an ophthalmoscope.

It is a specially designed torch used to examine the lens inside your eye, revealing signs of a cataract or the health of your optic nerve and retina. After this examination, you will be asked to read the letters from a chart. You have likely seen this familiar chart in places such as the Department of Motor Vehicles, doctor's offices and even schools.

**After the exam:** Once you have completed your eye exam, your optometrist will have a detailed understanding of the health of your eyes. She might recommend prescription glasses or contact lenses. In serious cases, she might even recommend corrective surgery.

Be honest about your concerns about your vision and create a game plan with your optometrist.

# Obesity and Vision

According to the American Heart Association, more than 78 million adults in the United States are obese. This condition puts people at high risk for heart conditions, diabetes and high blood pressure. It might surprise you that obesity also causes great strain on vision.

Obesity is measured through a body mass index, or ratio of weight to height. When the final number is 30 or higher, someone is considered obese. The AHA says this impacts one in three American adults. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle will ensure your weight doesn't impact your vision.

## HIGH-BLOOD PRESSURE

Being obese puts a tremendous amount of strain on the heart. The AHA reports that this encourages the development of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and high-blood pressure.

Your eyes rely on major blood vessels to provide nourishment to important components, such as the optic nerve, and outer and inner areas of the retina. These fragile vessels are subject to damage that can result in diminishing vision.

The extra pressure can be lessened by losing weight and lowering the amount of strain put on your heart and blood pressure. While someone suffers from high-blood pressure, there is a risk of visual blood vessels bursting or becoming blocked, inhibiting healthy blood flow to the components of your eyes.

## DIABETES AND VISION

Another dangerous disease often linked to obesity is diabetes. The American Diabetes Association recommends people with the disease have regular dilated-eye exams as vision problems are often experienced.

Blurred vision is one of the most common vision symptoms caused by diabetes. It is caused when high-blood



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sugar levels make eye lenses swell, and the sudden change of shape throws off vision. It is often experienced after consuming high levels of carbohydrates, in diabetic patients.

Low-glucose levels also are to blame in diabetic-eye problems. Instead of affecting lens shape, it might make it hard for the brain to focus.

## GETTING IN SHAPE

Obviously, the easiest way to get your weight under control is to incorporate a healthy diet and begin a strict exercise regimen.

Here are some recommendations from the American Heart Association for getting to a healthy weight.

**Cardiovascular health:** To enhance

overall heart health, perform at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days per week.

**Lower blood pressure:** In order to regulate blood-pressure levels, an average of 40 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity is recommended at least three or four times a week.