

**Amblyopia** (lazy eye) means that the eye has not developed the ability to see clearly as a result of an abnormality in the visual system. If there is an eye turn, initially the child will see double, but very quickly, the child's brain will ignore one image. If the same eye is ignored all the time, the programming in the brain for that eye's vision does not occur properly and amblyopia results. The same thing will happen if one eye is constantly out of focus due to a large difference in nearsightedness or farsightedness or if a cataract is prohibiting proper focus. Treating amblyopia requires treating the underlying cause first (strabismus, refractive error, cataract, etc.), then vision therapy may be done to reprogram the brain. Vision therapy becomes less effective as a child approaches the teen years, but may still provide visual improvement.



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**Color vision deficiency** is genetic, usually present from birth and is much more commonly found in boys, although women are carriers of the gene. Children with color deficiency should inform their teachers since some learning materials are color-coded.

**Eye health problems** found in childhood include congenital cataracts, congenital glaucoma, hereditary optic nerve diseases, intraocular tumors, retinopathy of prematurity as well as acquired conditions such as allergic, viral or bacterial conjunctivitis and styes. A comprehensive eye examination by one of our Optometric Physicians will include evaluations for all of the above conditions as well as an assessment of the functionality of the visual system.

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# **Your Child's Eyes**

## **BREVARD VISION CARE**

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## When & How Often Should a Child's Eyes Be Examined?

One of the most common questions regarding eye care is when does a child need his or her first eye exam. The answer varies based on family history of eye disease, the parents' observations of the child, and the appearance of the child's eyes. If there is no history of eye problems in the family, your child seems to be developing normally, and no abnormalities are noticed, then a routine eye examination should be performed by one of our Optometric Physicians prior to your child's 4th birthday.

## How Does Heredity Affect the Development of the Eyes?

Many eye conditions tend to run in families, and a good family history is helpful in assessing your child's eyes and vision. Conditions that are often inherited include: strabismus (eye turn), amblyopia (lazy eye), large amounts of nearsightedness, farsightedness, or astigmatism, congenital glaucoma, congenital cataracts, disorders of the optic nerve, and color vision deficiency. Some of these problems are present at birth, and some develop through childhood, so it is important to continue to have periodic eye examinations with one of our doctors.



Strabismus may be detected by parents through observation of your child for crossed or turned eyes, a head turn or unusual eye movements. Strabismus often occurs in the first few years of development, and is often accompanied by amblyopia, which develops gradually until the early grade school years. Early diagnosis and treatment is vital in children with amblyopia.

Most children develop farsightedness in the first few years, but as the eyes grow, the farsightedness lessens and nearsightedness may develop. As growth spurts occur, the eyes usually become more nearsighted. Environmental factors do not seem to be as important as genetics with regards to nearsightedness or farsightedness. The development of astigmatism is less predictable, but is easily detected by one of our Optometric Physicians.

## What Physical Signs May Indicate Eye Problems?

Children do not usually complain about visual problems in early childhood since they are undergoing many physical changes, and there is no frame of reference for normal vision. As a result, parents need to monitor the child's physical appearance, motor coordination and behavioral patterns for clues about potential vision problems. A child who seems to use one eye all of the time, has crossed eyes or eyes that turn, or any physical abnormalities such as large eyes or a white pupil, needs to be evaluated in our office.

As a child grows to grammar school age, headaches, eye-rubbing, redness and tearing may all be associated with vision problems. Complaints of blurry vision, double vision or reading difficulties also warrant an appointment for an eye examination.

## What are the Most Common Eye Problems and Their Treatments?

**Refractive errors** (nearsightedness, farsightedness, and astigmatism) and eye muscle problems (strabismus, convergence and divergence difficulties) are commonly detected in children, oftentimes in a child who feels "nothing is wrong".

Nearsightedness and astigmatism are commonly associated with difficulties seeing distant objects such as a blackboard and are usually corrected with eyeglasses or contact lenses. Farsightedness does not typically cause blurry vision, but is often associated with difficulties in reading, headaches, and eye-rubbing. Eyeglasses may be prescribed for farsightedness on a part-time or full-time basis depending on the doctor's findings.

**Strabismus** may be treated with eyeglasses, eye surgery or eye exercises based on the type and cause of the eye turn. Most cases of crossed eyes are caused by farsightedness and simply require glasses, while other types of strabismus are only correctable with surgery or exercises.



*Strabismus (esotropia)*