

# Eyesight in Children

## Should I have my child's eyes tested by an optometrist?

Regular eye examinations are important for your child's healthcare and personal development. An eye examination will ensure your child can see properly and that the eyes are healthy.

## The visual system in childhood.

Our visual system consists of the eyes sending messages to the brain. This pathway continues to develop from birth up to about the age of 8 years. A good clear image is required from both eyes for the visual system to develop to its full potential. Most children are born long-sighted (**hyperopia**) and this reduces as they grow. If the vision changes past the normal focus point they may become short-sighted (**myopia**).

## Common eyesight problems

- **Squint** is when the two eyes are not looking in the same direction. One eye may turn in or out or one eye may sit higher than the other.
- **Amblyopia** is the most common cause of poor vision in children. It is often referred to as lazy eye. Any problem that causes the vision in one eye to be blurry through childhood can cause amblyopia. Beyond the age of six it is very difficult to reverse amblyopia successfully. This is why it is very important to have an eye examination at an early age so treatment can be given.
- **Myopia** may happen as early as 4 or 5 years old but is most common at 11 to 12 years old and tends to follow growth spurts.

- **Astigmatism** is an irregularity of focus. The eye is unable to focus a sharp image onto the retina

## Symptoms of eye problems

- Squinting
- Peering closely at books / TV
- Bumping into objects
- Excessive blinking
- Headaches and tired eyes
- Poor performance at school

## At what age should your child have their first eye examination?

We usually recommend your child to have an eye test at three years of age or sooner if you are concerned. Children rarely know they have a problem with their eyes.

## Do I have to pay for my child's eye examination?

Children under sixteen and full time students under nineteen can have their eyes examined without charge on the NHS.

## What if my child doesn't know the alphabet?

This is not a problem as we have many checks including picture cards to assess the vision. The examination is carried out in a fun way, tailored to the age of the child.

Colour vision is also checked as well as the health of the eye.