



Children's Eyesight

Patient Information Sheet

North Yorkshire Local Optometric Committee

Baby's eyes

A baby's eyes are not fully developed at birth, even though they are already three-quarters of the size of an adult's eyes. It is quite normal for a new baby's eyes to seem uncoordinated - as if they aren't working together. But in the first few weeks of life their co-ordination develops. If a baby is developing normally and is shown different shapes, sizes and colours, by six months old he or she will be able to focus on fine detail.

What is a strabismus (squint)?

This happens when the eyes are not co-ordinating. There can be more than one reason for this, but the most common is that it runs in the family or the baby had a difficult birth.

Sometimes, what looks like a squint turns out to be a skin fold, because the baby's nose is not fully developed.

A full eye examination by the optometrist will show if a squint is present.

What is the treatment?

The optometrist will refer your child to hospital. The child may have to do eye exercises at home or when attending the Orthoptic Clinic at the Outpatients' Department B.

Sometimes, surgery is needed to correct the squint.

Early detection and treatment will give the best results. Uncorrected squints lead to permanent eyesight problems.

What about sight tests?

As well as squints, many eye defects can run in families, such as long- or short- sightedness and astigmatism. (Astigmatism is when objects look distorted.) Taking children for an eye examination is the best way to make sure that any defects are picked up and treated.

What about glasses?

A wide variety of comfortable and practical spectacle frames are available for children. Many are well designed: they look stylish and they also include spring hinges to make them last longer, and adjustable nose pads or saddle bridges to suit the smallest of noses.

What about contact lenses?

Older children can wear contact lenses. They must look after them very carefully, to keep them clean and safe. Also, they must have frequent eye check-ups to make sure their eyes stay healthy. Younger children are only prescribed contact lenses for special eye conditions.

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