

Eyes Right! Find Amblyopia Early



Good vision depends on the eyes and the brain working together. The pathway between the eyes and the brain can be affected when one eye sees more clearly than the other. The eye with less clear vision is not used as often and becomes even weaker. This condition is called amblyopia, or “lazy eye.”

What causes amblyopia?

Any condition that causes the brain to favor one eye and ignore the image in the other may cause amblyopia. Common causes include crossed eyes, cataracts, eyes that differ a lot in the degree of nearsightedness or farsightedness, injury, or a drooping eyelid.

When should amblyopia be treated?

Early treatment is easier and more likely to be successful than treatment that begins after age 5. Have a child examined for amblyopia if one eye turns in or out, the eyes don't appear to move together, a child has poor depth perception, or you believe he has a problem with vision. Often, amblyopia can be detected only by an eye doctor. All children should have a formal eye test before age 5.

How is amblyopia treated?

Treatment focuses on increasing the use of the weaker eye. Children often wear an eye patch on the stronger eye, take eye drops to temporarily blur vision in that eye, or wear corrective lenses. Surgery may be necessary first for some conditions, such as crossed eyes or cataracts. Treatment continues until vision is normal or a doctor determines it is no longer improving.

What if my child objects to the eye patch?

Sometimes children resist wearing the eye patch. They see less well through the weaker eye and may find that adhesive patches irritate their skin. Be sure to tell the child why the patch is necessary in terms he can understand. Try including some special time for fun when the patch is put on. Set simple rules, such as only Mom or Dad can touch the patch. Use a timer to sound when patch time is over. Let her decorate her patches. Prevent Blindness America offers an Eye Patch Club that kids can join. Call 1-800-331-2020.

Illinois Awareness Campaign

A statewide awareness campaign was launched in April 2004 to educate parents about amblyopia. Parents can call the Illinois Vision and Hearing Program at 1-800-545-2200 for more information. If they have no health insurance, parents can call 1-866-255-5437 to receive information about All Kids, the state health insurance program for children.

For related Web resources, see “Eyes Right! Find Amblyopia Early” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

The opinions, resources, and referrals provided in this Tip Sheet are intended for information purposes only and should not be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We advise parents to seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with questions regarding their child's health or medical conditions.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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