

MISALIGNED EYES

STRABISMUS REFERS TO THE MEDICAL CONDITION OF HAVING MISALIGNED EYES. THERE ARE SEVERAL TYPES of strabismus, and they are typically described by the direction of the eye's misalignment. For instance, it is commonly known as "wandering eye" or "wall eye" when the eye turns outwards, but it is called "crossed-eye" or "deviating eye" when the eye turns inwards.

In strabismus, you will have one eye looking at the target while the other eye looks away in the wrong direction horizontally, vertically or rotationally. Other times, you may have a combination of misalignment, such as having one eye looking up and out (i.e. horizontally and vertically misaligned).

Strabismus may either be constant - where the misalignment of the eye is always in the same direction - or intermittent, where the eye only deviates every once in a while. It can also alternate: sometimes the left eye is the culprit, and sometimes it is the right.

Most cases of strabismus develop in childhood and are the result of an abnormality in the neuromuscular control of the eye movement. It may also be a problem with the actual eye muscle controlling the eye, but this is far less common. Frequently, if farsightedness and focusing problems are left untreated for long periods of time, they often also develop strabismus, as do children who are born with defective visual processing centres in the brain.

Parents and other family members are usually the first to notice that a child's eyes are misaligned. Some signs of strabismus are unusual head tilting or face turning, squinting, closing one eye when gazing carefully at something or going into the sun), clumsiness, or the appearance of not looking directly at the object of regard. Older children and adults will frequently complain about double vision and loss of depth perception.

Young individuals "suppress" the image from the deviating eye in order not to see double: causing the brain to ignore the image from one eye completely. In older children and adults who acquire strabismus, however, they often do not learn to suppress the second image from the misaligned eye, resulting in double vision.

Adults with strabismus may have had the condition since childhood, or it may have recurred after going into "remission" for a period of time. However, individuals may also develop strabismus in adulthood as the result of many other conditions such as thyroid problems, trauma to the eye or eye socket, the development of neurological disorders (such as strokes) and so on. See a doctor at once if you suddenly develop this condition as an adult as it may be a sign of a more serious underlying condition.

Strabismus cannot be outgrown, though it can be treated. Early intervention through the use of patches (to prevent amblyopia, or "lazy eye") and surgery to restore the eye's normal alignment is the key to preserving healthy vision in young children. Certain cases of strabismus have also been known to respond very well to special glasses.

It is never too late to restore normal eye alignment, even in adults, and the treatment pros almost always outweigh the cons. Aside from the cosmetic improvement, straightening crossed eyes enlarges the visual field, allowing the patient to see wider and clearer. Straightening eyes also restores depth perception, and eliminates double vision, restoring a sense of well-being and balance to the patient. ■



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