

Childhood



DR LEO SEO WEI
OPHTHALMOLOGIST

Ophthalmologist **Dr Leo Seo Wei** explains: "Any child can develop eye problems. A positive family history puts the child at increased risk. Certain groups of patients - such as those born prematurely and those with disorders like Down Syndrome and cerebral palsy - may have increased risk of eye problems. As long as the child's visual behaviour is not normal, the child needs to be evaluated by an eye specialist."

Even with no problem, a child should have a detailed eye check before entering school. The eye specialist has special equipment and skills so that a child of any age (including newborn and pre-verbal children) can be tested.

The following, says Dr Leo, are two common childhood vision problems:

Lazy eye

This condition occurs when the vision of one eye is significantly better than the other. The brain begins to ignore the weaker eye, relying on the stronger one. This can happen because of strabismus (eye misalignment), or if there is an uncorrected difference in degrees of the eye or a block in the visual axis of one eye.

Infants are born with poor vision which improves as they grow. But in some babies, if the retina does not receive a clear image or if the eyes are not properly aligned, the infant's eyes stop developing

PARENTS' ALERT! SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

- 1
Crawling incorrectly
- 2
Bumping into furniture/walls
- 3
Loss of balance when standing up from a sitting position
- 4
Holding objects close to their nose to see/going up close to the TV to watch
- 5
Rubbing eyes and squinting frequently
- 6
Using only one eye and covering the other
- 7
Not focusing the eyes in same direction

normally. Depending on the cause, lazy eye can be treated by wearing special glasses, an eyepatch over the stronger eye, or clearing the source of visual loss.

Children don't outgrow true misalignment, which, if untreated, can result in loss of vision and depth perception, double vision or lazy eye.

Treatment of strabismus aims to straighten the eyes so that they can be used

together for perfect binocular vision. Timely treatment of lazy eye is crucial because visual damage can be irreversible if detected too late (after age eight).

Myopia

Nearly 30% of our 9 year olds are developing it, and children are becoming myopic at a younger age.

"The earlier the onset of myopia, the higher the degree of myopia becomes. The more myopic a person is, the more likely he will develop blinding complications such as retinal detachment, macular degeneration, cataracts and glaucoma in the future," says Dr Leo.

The risk factors are excessive nearwork like reading, writing, computer use and lack of time outdoors. Exposure to sunlight can prevent excessive eye growth and myopia development.

The most effective method to slow the progression of myopia is with ultra low dose - 0.01% - atropine eye drops.

Parents must ensure compliance with the doctors' recommendations for their child, such as glasses. Good nutrition, exercise and a well-balanced lifestyle help children's eyes stay healthy. UV protection is important, and so are eating right and staying fit, not just for the child's eyes but overall health.

A diet rich with fruits, vegetables (especially green leafy ones) and omega-3 fatty acids that reduce inflammation is a good idea.

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