

OPHTHALMOLOGY

5 things to know about lazy eye

About 3–5% of children are affected by this condition, also known as amblyopia. Find out more.



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Having lazy eye does not mean there is anything wrong with the structure of the eye

It means that something has interfered with normal cortical visual development in one or both eyes. It occurs when vision in one eye is significantly better than that of the other eye, and the brain begins to rely on the better eye and ignore the weaker one. As a result, the weaker eye gets weaker.

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Lazy eye can be caused by crossed eyes and other conditions

Crossed eyes — strabismus — develops when the eyes are not straight. One eye may turn in, out, up or down. When this happens, the corresponding part of the brain “switches off” the eye that is not straight, and vision in that eye begins to deteriorate. This can lead to lazy eye if the crossed eye gets used much less than the uncrossed one. Other causes of lazy eye are related to sight that is obstructed by conditions such as cataracts, droopy eyelids and refractive errors. The brain “switches off” the eye with more problems, and the vision in that eye deteriorates further.

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It's good to go for vision tests early

Most children with amblyopia don't complain of decreased acuity because the eyes look normal and they can function effectively with the good eye. They do not notice it until one eye is occluded. Sometimes, they complain that one eye is blurry, or report discomfort in the affected eye, poor depth perception or clumsiness. Amblyopia is often not discovered until the child has a vision test.

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The later the treatment, the worse the recovery

Children treated early (especially before age seven) usually recover almost completely with normal vision, although they may continue to have problems with depth perception. If a child is treated at an older age (say after 13), he or she may experience only partial recovery of vision, while delaying treatment further can result in permanent vision problems.

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Even a toddler can have an eye exam

Parents should send their children for a complete eye examination at least once before the age of five. If the child is too young to speak, special techniques can measure visual acuity and eye power.

