

First Impressions – A guide to your baby’s eyes.



Before they're six months

Most babies begin to turn from side to side and use their arms and legs. Eye movement and eye/body coordination skills begin to develop further and both eyes should focus equally. Offering different shapes and textures to discover with their fingers and playing “patty cake” and “peek-a-boo” will all help your baby’s visual skills develop.

Mark it on your calendar!

Six months old – your first visit to the optometrist

Don’t worry, there’s no need to have your baby study for this test! They won’t have to read the eye chart in order for an accurate and complete eye examination to be performed. In fact, your optometrist will test for excessive or unequal amounts of near-sightedness, far-sightedness or astigmatism; eye movement ability; as well as eye health problems, all in a way that will make you and your baby comfortable and at ease.

There are a few ways to make this first visit most enjoyable:

- Work around fussy times. You know your baby best; schedule your appointment at a time when baby is generally relaxed and happy.
- Ask to have any required paperwork sent to you before the appointment so that it can be filled out at home and brought in on the day of the exam.
- Pat yourself on the back for knowing how vital this first eye exam is and for getting yourself out the door to make it there on time!



From **six** to **twelve** months

Your child will be quite mobile (and you'll likely be much more tired!) Your child is now developing the vision skills necessary to use both eyes together, to judge distances and manipulate their surroundings with greater accuracy. Their play is really their work!

To encourage the development of eye-hand-foot-body coordination, try not to encourage early walking. Crawling and exploring are what they need to be doing right now. Offer toys your baby can touch, hold and see at the same time.

From their **first** birthday to their **third** birthday.



During this stage eye-hand coordination and depth perception will continue to develop. Learning to see efficiently and effectively requires full coordination between your child's two eyes. Active playing and normal toddler games all help develop and strengthen your child's vision. By the age of three, many of the vision skills required for life-long learning are reasonably developed.

By **three** years of age

Your child should have their second thorough eye examination. Your optometrist will reassess your child's visual system to confirm the absence of any eye disease, as well as monitor the continued growth and efficiency of their visual skill development. This is also the examination where eye muscle problems such as crossed-eyes (strabismus) and lazy eye (amblyopia) are carefully assessed.

Amblyopia or lazy eye, is the loss or lack of development of vision in an eye that is healthy. The lack or loss of vision is not due to an eye health problem. Amblyopia can be caused by strabismus (crossed-eyes), unequal refractive error, far-sightedness or near-sightedness, or a physical obstruction like a cataract. The brain "learns" to see with the good eye only and the other eye grows weaker from disuse. It is estimated that 2-4% of all children have amblyopia. Amblyopia is responsible for more cases of vision loss in our children than all other ocular diseases and traumas combined. The good news is that in many cases this condition is reversible. The earlier that treatment begins, the greater the chance for success.

The best news is that with early detection and treatment, many vision problems are REVERSABLE and in some cases PREVENTABLE.

Children need to have their eyes examined at 6 months, 3 years, before starting school and then every 12 to 24 months.

Between **three years** and **five years** of age

Through these important years your child's eyes will gain all the necessary vision skills needed to be ready for reading!

Your child should visit the optometrist before their first day of school. With the test results of the previous two eye examinations (six months and three years of age) your optometrist can assess how well your child's vision is continuing to develop. This is an important appointment because it assures you that your child's eyes are ready for their next big challenge – school.



Vision 101 for parents



Your baby's vision skills have already taken great strides. Tracking moving objects and beginning to reach for things, these are all baby steps that lead toward eye-hand coordination and depth perception.

Mother Nature knew what she was doing when she made a baby's initial focusing distance 20-30 cm, after all, it's the distance from the crook of your arm ("your baby's favourite place to be) to your eyes. To encourage healthy vision skills, keep "reach and touch" toys within your child's focusing distance, alternate right and left sides with each feeding and talk to your baby as you walk around the room. Frequently change the crib position and your child's position in it and hang a visually stimulating mobile (black and white is a proven favorite) above their crib or change table.

Did you Know?

Those baby blues, browns, greens and hazels are not only beautiful, they're also very busy.

Let our child's first test be an eye exam! From birth to about age five your baby will make sophisticated leaps in vision that are very much like the leaps they'll make in crawling, walking and talking. During the first five years your child will learn lifelong vision skills – accurately or inaccurately. It's the development of these skills that lays the foundation for one of their most precious gifts – their vision.

With every examination, your optometrist will determine if your child's eyes are healthy and working together efficiently.

Bravo! You've completed Vision 101 for Parents.

There isn't a time in a parent's life when we aren't the guardians of our children's vision. It's a big job and an important one too. Enjoy marveling at those baby blues, greens, browns and hazels and watch them grow right before your very eyes!

