

Your School-Age Child's Eyes



Good schools, good teachers, good vision

You want a good education for your child. That means good schools, good teachers and good vision.

That's right. Good vision. Your school-age child's eyes are constantly in use in the classroom and at play. So when his or her vision is not functioning properly, learning and participation in recreational activities will suffer. There are things, however, you can do to be certain your child's vision is ready for school each year and to relieve the visual stress of schoolwork.

Vision skills for school

Good vision involves many different vision skills working together to enable your child to see clearly and to understand what he or she sees.

The basic vision skills needed for school are:

-  Near Vision. The ability to see clearly and comfortably at 10-13 inches, the distance at which school desk work should be done.
-  Distant Vision. The ability to see clearly and comfortably beyond arms reach.
-  Binocular Coordination. The ability to use both eyes together.
-  Eye Movement Skills. The ability to aim the eyes accurately, move them smoothly across a page, and shift them quickly and accurately from one object to another.
-  Focusing Skills. The ability to keep both eyes accurately focused at the proper distance to see clearly and to change focus quickly from chalkboard to desk and back as required for copying.



Peripheral Awareness. The ability to be aware of things located to the side while looking straight ahead.



Eye/Hand Coordination. The ability to use the eyes and hands together.



If any of these or other vision skills is lacking or not functioning properly, your child will have to work harder. This can lead to headaches, fatigue and other eye-strain symptoms.

Also, the visual demands of schoolwork can affect these vision skills, causing a vision problem where none existed before.

Don't rely on vision screenings

Don't assume your child has good vision because he or she passed a school vision screening. A 20/20 score means only that your child can see at 20 feet what he or she should be able to see at that distance. It does not relate to any of the other vision skills needed for learning.

Vision screenings are not a substitute for a thorough vision examination.

Be alert for symptoms

Be alert for symptoms that may indicate your child has a vision or visual processing problem. Note if your child frequently:

-  Loses his or her place while reading;
-  Avoids close work;
-  Holds reading material closer than normal;
-  Tends to rub eyes;
-  Has Headaches;
-  Turns or tilts head to use one eye only;

-  Makes frequent reversals when reading or writing;
-  Uses finger to maintain place while reading;
-  Omits or confuses small words when reading;
-  Performs below potential.

S *Seek thorough optometric care*

Because vision changes can occur without your or your child realizing it, have your child's vision examined at least every two years or as recommended by your doctor of optometry.

The examination should include:

- A review of your child's health and vision history;
- Tests for visual acuity, refractive errors, nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, lazy eye, crossed-eyes, eye coordination, focusing ability, eye movement control, depth perception and color vision;
- A comprehensive eye health examination.

I *f your child's eyes need help*

After assessing your child's test results, your optometrist may prescribe glasses, contact lenses or vision therapy.

When indicated, he or she may also recommend preventive measures, such as mild prescription lenses to be worn only when doing schoolwork, watching television or using a computer. These help your child meet the visual demands and prevent eyestrain.

Vision therapy is prescribed for conditions which cannot adequately be treated with glasses or contact lenses alone. By encouraging development of adequate visual skills, vision therapy improves conditions such as poor eye coordination and movement, lazy eye and makes visual perceptual problems easier to handle.

H *omework, computers and TV*

Make sure your child's homework area is evenly lighted and free from glare. Furniture should be the right size for proper posture. During periods of close concentration, have your child take periodic breaks to rest his or her eyes.

When your child is using a computer or playing video games, he or she should also take periodic rest breaks. If your child spends many hours working with a computer, ask your optometrist to suggest ways to help avoid vision-related problems.

To make viewing easier on your child's eyes:

- Be sure the room has soft overall lighting;
- Place the screen to avoid glare and reflections;
- View TV from a distance of about 6-8 feet or approximately 5 times the width of the screen away.

Be sure your child's hours away from school include time for active visual motor activity and creative play. Both can help keep his or her vision skills functioning properly.

General eye protection

Teach your child these eye safety rules:

- ☞ Keep away from targets of darts, bow-and-arrow, BB guns and missile-throwing toys;
- ☞ Don't run with or throw sharp objects;
- ☞ Wear safety goggles when using chemistry sets, power tools, fireworks and household and yard chemicals (note: Be certain your child is mature enough to handle these items safely and always provide proper adult supervision).

Afinal word

Your care and concern for your child's vision can enrich his or her future and, at the same time, help develop good eye care habits for a lifetime of good vision.



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!

