



## Why it's Essential to Schedule an Eye Exam for Your Child

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Today, most children receive preventive medical care in the form of vaccines and early wellness visits. They also get preventive dental care with early dental exams before a toothache occurs. Unfortunately, most kids go to the eye doctor only after they have struggled to see for months—or even years—and have already lost 20/20 vision.

The American Optometric Association (AOA) recommends complete eye exams at ages 1, 3, and 5. The quick screenings that may be offered in school or at a wellness check are a poor substitute for a full eye exam. The traditional Snellen test was invented over 150 years ago and misses more problems than it finds. For example, the test frequently fails to identify kids who may be struggling in school due to being farsighted, having some astigmatism, and binocular coordination problems.

Some states require every student to have an eye doctor's exam before entering kindergarten. In addition to checking for 20/20 sight, an optometrist tests for amblyopia, depth perception, color vision, eye muscle coordination, focusing skills, and a thorough check of eye health. The eye is an extension of the brain and the visual system is the major sense that influences a child's ability to learn and thrive in school.

Most infants do not need glasses because birth defects are relatively rare but problems can be diagnosed and treated early when they do occur. Johnson & Johnson sponsors a national program providing free infant eye exams (InfantSee.org). Much can be learned about vision and eye health through these exam. Early intervention is very important when a problem is discovered.

Amblyopia, commonly referred to as lazy eye, should be treated as early as possible.

Most students begin their education with good sight but many studies have shown that excessive screen time and early reading can cause the loss of 20/20 and progressive myopia (nearsightedness). Today, many children spend much of their time looking at a tablet or cell phone held very close to their eyes. Myopia control treatments can involve the use of anti-stress glasses, contact lenses, and/or topical eye medications. The eyes can adapt and change with overuse just as the rest of the body changes from physical training. The AOA recommends that kids look 20 feet away every 20 minutes for 20 seconds.

Parents don't wait for childhood diseases or a toothache to seek medical advice but often wait until the school nurse or pediatrician finds a vision problem. Many children need more than a pair of glasses. Focusing and binocular eye muscle coordination skills are learned but can be deficient. Poor vision skills can contribute to learning disabilities. Some optometrists specialize in treating kids with developmental vision delays.

There are 58,000 optometrists nationwide providing primary vision care with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Seek one out to make sure you are not overlooking any problems with your child's vision.