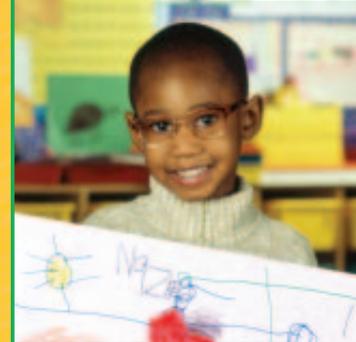


What Is Amblyopia?



Am•bly•opi•a: An eye problem in young children that can lead to blindness if untreated.





WHAT IS AMBLYOPIA?

Amblyopia (am-blee-oh-pee-ah) is the medical name for “lazy eye.” It can lead to reduced vision in an eye that isn’t used enough early in childhood.

Amblyopia affects 2 or 3 out of every 100 children. If untreated, it can cause blindness in the underused eye.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

There are three major causes.

1. Misaligned eyes (“strabismus”).

Amblyopia is most often caused by misaligned or crossed eyes. When a child’s eyes do not line up properly, the brain turns off one eye to avoid double vision.

2. Unequal focus.

Amblyopia can also result when one eye sees better than the other – for example, when one eye is very nearsighted. The stronger eye is used more than the weaker eye, and eventually, the stronger eye takes over completely, and the weaker eye stops working.

3. Cataracts and other problems.

Amblyopia caused by cataracts (cloudiness in the eye tissues) is less common, but more severe. It must be treated in the first 2 months of life.

CAN AMBLYOPIA BE TREATED?

Yes! Treatment can improve vision and prevent blindness for most children – but *only* if the problem is found early enough. The sooner the treatment, the better the chance a child will get vision back in the weaker eye.

By age 8 or 9 years, a child’s visual development is complete, and it may be too late to treat amblyopia successfully.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A CHILD HAS AMBLYOPIA?

Unless a child has a crossed eye, there is often no way for parents to tell that something is wrong. To find amblyopia, children should be tested during their annual check-up.

The doctor should:

- Test vision in each eye by having a child read a chart containing rows of letters or signs.
- Check to see if the eyes are working together (“fusion test”).
- Make a referral to an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) if a problem is detected.



HOW IS AMBLYOPIA TREATED?

1. Problems that cause amblyopia are treated first.



- Glasses are commonly prescribed to improve focusing or alignment of the eyes.
- Surgery may be performed on the eye muscles to straighten the eyes.
- Eye exercises may be recommended either before or after surgery to correct visual habits.

2. Then, the weaker eye can be strengthened.



- **Patching** or covering one eye may be required. The better-seeing eye is patched, forcing the “lazy” one to work.
- **Medication** (eye drops or ointment) may be used to blur the vision of the stronger eye to force the weaker one to work. This technique is usually used only for mild cases.

HOW LONG DOES TREATMENT LAST?

Treatment may be required for a few weeks to as long as a year. After treatment, children need frequent check-ups until the age of 9 or 10 to make sure that amblyopia does not return.

Tips for helping your child wear an eye patch

- Make sure your child knows wearing a patch is important.
- Never punish or criticize your child for not cooperating perfectly with treatment. It’s not easy to look or feel “different.” Gently but firmly remind your child what the treatment is for, that it won’t last forever, and that it’s worth it.
- Tell teachers, caregivers, and playmates what the patch is for, and encourage their support.
- If the glue in the patch causes irritation, your child might prefer a “pirate’s patch.”
- If your child is shy about wearing a patch outside the home and it is only needed for a few hours each day, your doctor may say it’s okay to wear it only at home.

All children should have annual vision screenings. No child is too young for an eye exam to detect vision impairments.

Most insurance plans, including Medicaid, cover the cost of complete vision screening and at least one pair of glasses.

Call 311 for more information on amblyopia or vision screening, or visit nyc.gov/health.



Other Resources

National Eye Institute (NEI)

301-496-5248
www.nei.nih.gov

Prevent Blindness America

800-331-2020, 847-843-2020
www.preventblindness.org

Vision Connection

800-829-0500
www.visionconnection.org

AllAboutVision.com

www.allaboutvision.com

American Academy of Ophthalmology

415-561-8500
www.aao.org

The Optometrists Network

www.strabismus.org

American Optometric Association

314-991-4100
www.aoa.org

American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus

415-561-8505
www.aapos.org