



## Prevent Permanent Vision Loss

### Test Children for Amblyopia and Refer to Treatment Early

Amblyopia (pronounced “am-blee-oh-pee-ah”) is a vision problem in young children. It can lead to permanent vision loss if left untreated. Three out of every 100 adults have permanently reduced vision because their amblyopia was not treated when they were children.

#### What causes amblyopia?

The eyes and the brain work together to help us see. When a person has amblyopia, one of the eyes does not communicate well with the brain. As a result, the part of the brain responsible for vision in that eye does not develop as well as it should.

#### Amblyopia happens when:

1. One eye is out of focus;
2. The eyes do not line up properly (strabismus);
3. There is a cloudy area in the eye lens (cataract) or an eyelid problem; or
4. There is severe nearsightedness, farsightedness or asymmetry of the eye’s cornea (astigmatism).

#### How can you tell if a child has amblyopia?

Unless a child has a crossed eye, droopy lid or cataract, parents usually cannot tell if something is wrong. To detect amblyopia, children should have their vision tested at annual visits to the pediatrician and when vision tests are given in school.

During the test, the child must identify the letters or pictures on a chart with one eye covered. Each eye is tested separately. If there is a problem, the child should see a pediatric eye doctor (ophthalmologist or optometrist).

#### Can amblyopia be treated?

Yes! Treatment can improve vision and prevent permanent vision loss for most children—but *only* if the problem is found early. The sooner the treatment, the better the chance a child will get vision back in the amblyopic eye. By age 8 or 9, it may be too late to treat amblyopia successfully.



## How is amblyopia treated?

### 1. Address the cause of the amblyopia.

The doctor may prescribe glasses to improve focusing or to align the eyes. The child may need surgery if he or she has a cataract or another physical problem with the eye.

### 2. Strengthen the amblyopic eye.

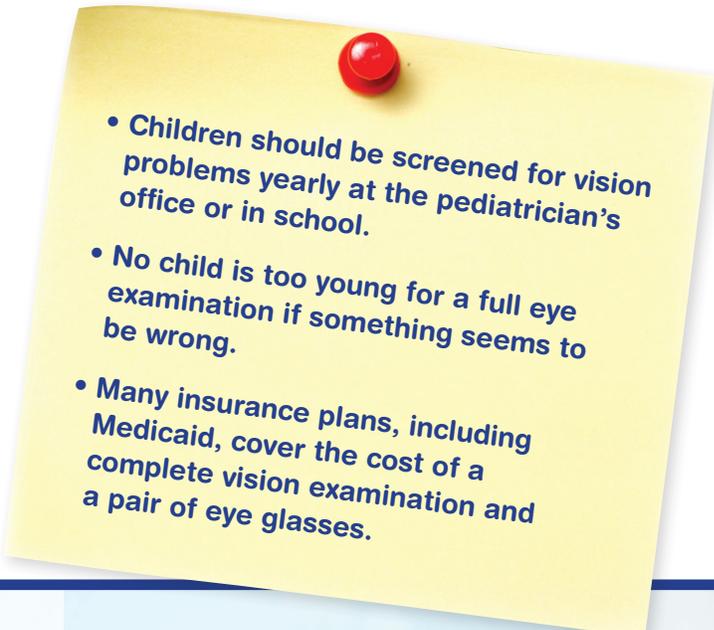
The child may need to patch the stronger eye for a few hours a day, and/or the doctor may prescribe eye drops or ointment that blur the vision of the stronger eye, forcing the amblyopic eye to work.

#### Tips for parents

- Make sure your child knows that wearing a patch is important and is not a punishment. Be firm, but kind. It's not easy to look or feel different.
- If your child wears a patch outside of the home, explain the importance of the patch to teachers, caregivers and playmates, and encourage their support.

## How long does treatment last?

Treatment can last from a few weeks to more than a year. After treatment, the child will need check-ups until age 9 or 10 to make sure that the amblyopia is gone.

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- Children should be screened for vision problems yearly at the pediatrician's office or in school.
  - No child is too young for a full eye examination if something seems to be wrong.
  - Many insurance plans, including Medicaid, cover the cost of a complete vision examination and a pair of eye glasses.



## Other Resources

**New York City Health Department**  
[nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)

**American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus**  
[www.aapos.org](http://www.aapos.org)

**National Eye Institute**  
[www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov)

**American Academy of Ophthalmology**  
[www.aao.org](http://www.aao.org)

**American Academy of Pediatrics**  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

**American Optometric Association**  
[www.aoa.org](http://www.aoa.org)

**Prevent Blindness America**  
[www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)