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LAZY EYE (AMBLYOPIA)

What is lazy eye?

Lazy eye, or amblyopia, is loss of vision in eyes that is not corrected by glasses. It is a condition that starts in childhood. More than one in 50 children have amblyopia. If not treated, it can cause lifelong vision loss in the problem eye.

Amblyopia has many causes. Most often, it results when a child has crossed eyes or eyes that don't line up. One eye that focuses better than the other can also cause amblyopia. One in 20 preschool children has an eye problem that could cause amblyopia.

In both cases, one eye becomes stronger. The strong eye takes on more of the job of seeing while the weak eye is used less. If the problem is not treated, the weak eye will be able to see less and less, and vision gets worse.

You can protect your child from vision loss caused by amblyopia if you:

- Look for signs of lazy eye
- Have your child's vision checked one eye at a time

What are the signs of lazy eye?

Many different problems can cause lazy eye. Here are some signs of eye trouble that could be related to lazy eye or other eye problems:

- Favoring one eye
- Tilting the head
- An eye drifts or wanders when the child is tired, sick or in bright light
- Your child tends to close one eye, especially in sunlight
- Rubbing the eyes
- Your child seems to blink too much
- Your child holds things close to his or her eyes

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, certified vision screening training, community and patient service programs and research.

If you notice these or other signs of eye trouble, take your child to an eye doctor right away.

Some children with eye problems may show no signs of eye trouble!

Have your child's eyes checked

Remember, treatment works best when lazy eye is found early. A child's eyes should be checked:

- Shortly after birth
- At 6 months of age
- Before starting school (age 3 or 4)
- Throughout the school years as needed

Regular eye care is important even when your child shows no signs of eye trouble.

How does an eye doctor treat lazy eye?

First, a doctor must treat the cause of amblyopia. Here are some common treatments:

- Glasses can correct focus or help eyes that are not lined up.
- Surgery on eye muscles can help

straighten the eyes if other treatments don't work. Surgery can help both eyes work together.

- Eye exercises may help the weak eye see better.

Along with treating the cause, the doctor must help the weak eye grow strong again. There are several ways to do this:

- Patching or covering the strong eye makes the "lazy eye" work harder. Your child may need to wear an eye patch for a few weeks or many months.
- Your child will have to visit the eye doctor regularly to see if the weaker eye is getting stronger. Patching works best in early childhood, but a doctor may recommend patching at any time.
- Medicine such as eye drops or ointment can be used instead of patching in some cases to blur the vision in the stronger eye.
- Glasses or contact lenses can also be used to blur vision in the strong eye, helping the weak eye work harder.

Support your child's treatment

If you have a child with amblyopia, he or she may be frustrated with treatment such as patching. Understand the problem, and be patient. The Eye Patch Club™, a support program for children with amblyopia and their families, can be a big help. Call 1-800-331-2020 for more information.

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