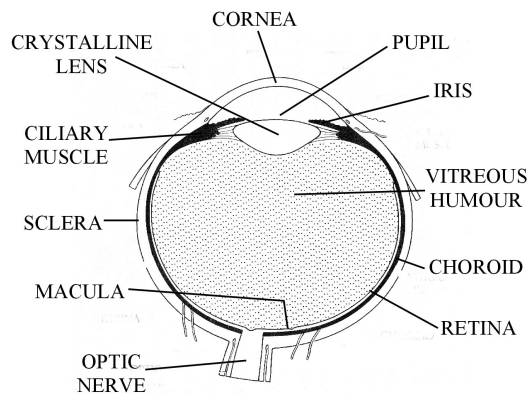


# children's eyes



## Babies' Vision.

At birth the vision is not very good. Within a few weeks babies will react to faces they know and which are close to them but they are not able to focus properly until about six months old. Their eyes also appear quite uncoordinated, but this improves over the first few weeks. It is also common for their eyes to change colour.

## What is a Squint (Strabismus)?

A squint is where the two eyes do not coordinate properly, and one eye turns in, out, up or down. There are several causes of this, but the most common are that it runs in the family, or a difficult birth. Diseases like measles can also cause problems. Sometimes what appears to be a squint is just a fold of skin across the nose, because the baby's nose hasn't fully developed yet.

A sight test by an optometrist will show if a squint is present.

## Can a Squint be Treated?

If the optometrist finds a squint, the child will usually be referred to the hospital. There they will see an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) and an orthoptist (a specialist in treating binocular vision problems). Many squints can be treated with eye exercises or spectacles, or both. Sometimes an operation may be needed.

## Isn't a Squint Just a Cosmetic Problem?

No. If a squint is left untreated the affected eye will not develop properly, leaving it 'lazy'. After the age of seven or eight, the lazy eye cannot be improved.

## **Should I Tell the Schoolteacher That My Child Has a Squint?**

Yes. Children with a squint find it more difficult to judge depth, and can seem clumsy. The treatment very often also needs the cooperation of the teacher.

## **Can Children Have Sight Tests?**

Children of any age can have a sight test, but most optometrists recommend regular tests from the age of three. Vision problems such as short-sight, long-sight and astigmatism (where the eye is shaped like a rugby ball) can all run in families, and a sight test is the best way of detecting and correcting them. All children under sixteen can have a free sight test on the NHS.

Optometrists can also test for other things, such as faulty colour vision and dyslexia.

## **What About Spectacles?**

These days children's frames are much more stylish than the old NHS frames of years ago. They are designed to fit on children's small noses, and many are fitted with spring sides so they can stand up to the wear and tear! All children under sixteen are entitled to the NHS voucher to put towards the cost.

## **How About Contact Lenses?**

Older children (12+) are usually fine with contact lenses, so long as they understand the responsibility and can look after them properly. Younger children are usually fitted with contact lenses for special eye problems.

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