



Amblyopia

Amblyopia is the medical term for **"lazy-eye,"** when one eye is simply not being used and the vision becomes lazy and weak. The reason for treating amblyopia early in life is because meaningful improvement **CANNOT** be obtained after eight to nine years of age. Amblyopia is the leading cause of blindness in children. The brain cells that do the visual perceiving develop and mature only in the early years and do not have the capacity for enhanced vision at a later age. Therefore, if treatment is not obtained, the child grows up with only one "good" seeing eye.

The most common cause of amblyopia is strabismus, that is, when one eye is crooked and not aligned straight. The second most common cause of amblyopia is a marked difference in refractive error between the eyes, usually far-sightedness. Straightening out the eyes is important for different reasons (to obtain binocular vision, fusion, depth perception, and for the psychological benefit of "looking normal"), but it is not as important as obtaining 20/20 vision in each eye for a lifetime.

Both eyes must be used in the first 8 to 9 years of life in order to prevent amblyopia. If one eye has amblyopia, the good eye must be occluded or blurred in order to force the weak eye to see. Most often we use an eye patch over the good eye. However, at times, we use a blurring "foil" that sticks to the spectacle lens of the good eye. We also, at times, put dilating drops in the good eye, to blur the good eye and force the child to use the non-preferred, amblyopic eye.

Amblyopia is usually 100% correctable when it is recognized and treated early in life. If it is discovered at four to six years of age, some improvement can occur, but not always to the normal 20/20 level. The duration of patching is only a few weeks within the first year of life, but may vary from weeks to months when first treated later in childhood.

Patching does not straighten the eyes; it only improves the vision in the lazy eye. Straightening the eyes requires glasses or surgery. Some children whose vision in one eye is out of focus (for example, farsightedness, near-sightedness, and astigmatism) require glasses in addition to the patch in order for the lazy eye to see clearly. These children require glasses for the amblyopic eye that is out of focus and patching of the good focused eye to force the child to use the weaker vision eye.

Even when vision normalizes after treatment the eyes have to be checked periodically until eight to nine years of age. It is possible for the vision to regress, for which periodic patching is needed. Also, part-time occlusion until eight to nine years of age is often used to prevent vision from decreasing in the treated amblyopic eye.

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