

Amblyopia

Lazy Eye

What is Amblyopia?

Amblyopia is poor vision in an eye that has not developed sight in a normal way. Amblyopia, often called lazy eye, is a childhood eye condition. It is the most common cause of visual impairment in children.

If your child has been diagnosed with amblyopia, it is important to treat this condition as early as possible because:

- early treatment can prevent a permanent decrease of vision
- something could happen in the future to the vision in the good eye
- some jobs require good vision in both eyes.

Your child's vision will develop until age 8 or 9. After that, treatment for amblyopia will be less effective. According to the National Eye Institute, amblyopia is reported to be the leading cause of vision loss in one eye for people ages 20 to 70.

What Causes Amblyopia?

Amblyopia is caused by some common eye conditions that can prevent an eye from developing normal sight, including:

- **strabismus (crossed eyes)**
eyes are misaligned and one doesn't focus as well as the other
- **refractive errors**
one eye is more nearsighted, farsighted or has more astigmatism than the other and is out of focus
- **childhood cataract**
cloudy vision in one eye.

In these and other eye conditions that can cause amblyopia, one eye becomes stronger than the other one. The weaker eye does not develop as it should. If left untreated, the weaker eye may become useless.

How is Amblyopia Detected?

Unless an eye condition is easy to see, such as crossed eyes, it can be difficult to detect amblyopia.

Make sure your child receives an eye exam as part of his or her health care between the ages of 6 months to 1 year.

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How is Amblyopia Treated?

Treating amblyopia is often a two-step process.

First, the cause of amblyopia may need to be corrected. For example, a child with crossed eyes may need surgery. Or a child with a refractive error may need glasses.

Second, amblyopia itself is treated by forcing the weaker eye to work harder. Your child's eye care provider may use an eye patch or eye drops.

- An eye patch over the stronger eye will force the weaker eye to focus better.
- Eye drops in the stronger eye will blur vision in that eye, forcing the weaker eye to take over. Treating amblyopia may take a few months to a few years.

You and your child's eye care provider will decide what course of treatment will work best.

Information adapted from the National Eye Institute of the National Institutes of Health.