

Strabismus

Misaligned Eyes

Strabismus

Strabismus is an eye condition most often indicated by eyes that are not aligned with each other — eyes not working together.

One or both eyes may turn in, out, up or down. These signs of strabismus may be present all the time or they may come and go. Infants' eyes may each seem to move on their own, but by 4 to 6 months of age, a baby's eyes should be aligned with each other.

You may hear strabismus referred to as “cross eyes,” “wandering eyes” or “wall eyes,” depending on which way the eye turns.

Other, less common signs of strabismus include a turned or tilted head, squinting or getting too close to an object when looking at it.

Strabismus is most common in young children. They may be born with it, or it may develop within 2 to 3 years of birth. It is a condition that runs in families (is hereditary) and is often caused by an imbalance in eye muscles. In very rare cases, injury or serious disease may cause strabismus.

The Risk of Strabismus

In normal vision, both eyes focus on the same thing, sending the same visual image to the brain. If your child has a misaligned eye, each eye sends a different image to the brain. The brain will block out the image from the weaker, misaligned eye.

This will result in reduced vision in the weaker eye, a condition called amblyopia. If amblyopia is not successfully treated by age 8 or 9, it can lead to permanent impaired or lost vision in the affected eye. The earlier strabismus and amblyopia are treated, the better the chance for normal vision to develop in your child.

Your child will not outgrow strabismus. If you see signs of strabismus in your child or infant older than 4 months, it is important to have an eye care provider check your child's eyes right away.

Diagnosing Strabismus

Your child's eye care provider will:

- ask you about your child's medical history and ask if other family members have strabismus
- check your child's vision with tests that match your child's age
- check your child's external eye muscles
- check the inside of your child's eyes to see if there are signs of disease that may be causing strabismus.

Treating Strabismus

Your child's eye care provider may recommend one or more of the following to treat strabismus:

- a patch or eye drops to blur vision in your child's good eye and force the weaker eye to work better

(over)

- glasses to improve focus and straighten your child's eyes
- eye exercises to improve the way your child's eyes work together
- surgery on eye muscles if other treatments are not successful. Sometimes more than one surgery is needed.

The amount of time it takes to treat strabismus varies from several months to a few years.

The most important part of treatment is to make the weak eye stronger, so be sure to follow your child's eye care provider's directions carefully.