

The importance of back-to-school eye exams for children

Children's vision problems are common — probably more common than you think. Researchers say up to **10 percent of preschoolers and up to 25 percent of school-age children** have vision disorders, and many of these problems can affect learning.

Unfortunately, many children's vision problems don't have obvious signs and symptoms and aren't detected in school vision screenings. In fact, **up to 75 percent of school vision screenings miss vision problems**. The only way to know for sure if your children have the visual skills they need in school is to make sure they have routine comprehensive eye exams performed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Back-to-school season serves as a great reminder to set your children up for success. All it takes? A proper eye exam.



Sections include:

- + Why children's eye exams are critical for school success
- + Symptoms of learning-related vision problems in children
- + AOA-recommended eye exam timeline
- + The impact of the digital era on children's vision
- + An understanding of eye exams and vision benefits

Why children's eye exams are so important for classroom success

Early childhood eye exams are essential to ensure normal visual development and confirm there are no vision problems that might affect academic performance when a child reaches school age.

Experts say roughly **80 percent** of what a child learns before age 13 is presented visually, so it's not surprising that good vision is necessary for optimal learning. And, given that even preschoolers these days routinely use computers and portable electronic devices, it's reasonable to assume that detecting vision problems early is more important than ever.

New parents need to pay close attention to their child's eyes beginning in infancy. Some children are born with eye alignment problems — called strabismus — that can cause incomplete visual development (amblyopia or "lazy eye"). If not detected and treated early, strabismus and amblyopia can cause permanent visual disability.

Some cases of strabismus are obvious, with one eye being noticeably "crossed" (turned inward) or "wall-eyed" (turned outward). If you suspect your infant has misaligned eyes, be sure to mention this to your pediatrician during routine wellness visits. To completely rule out strabismus, amblyopia, and other vision problems, however, take your child to an eye doctor.

Many infants and toddlers are affected by common refractive errors such as farsightedness and astigmatism, which can cause eye strain, headaches, blurred vision, and avoidance of reading. These vision problems pose a greater risk for learning problems than strabismus.



The most common children's vision problem is myopia (nearsightedness). Though myopia typically doesn't affect reading, it causes blurred distance vision.

For parents with school-age children, continue watching for signs fairly closely, even though they may not always be obvious. When a new school year rolls around, you can start fresh with an eye exam, which will serve as a benchmark of where your child's vision is at. Your eye doctor will help you stay on the pulse of your child's eye health every step of the way.

Symptoms of learning-related vision problems in children

There are many (not-so-obvious) signs and symptoms of learning-related vision problems, all of which you can read about [in this article by the College of Optometrists in Vision Development](#). **But the most common signs that a vision problem may be interfering with your child's ability to read and learn are:**

- Skipping or rereading lines
- Avoiding reading and other close activities
- Poor reading comprehension
- Reversing letters like "b" into "d" when reading
- A short attention span with reading and schoolwork



Signs that may indicate a vision problem overall:

- Complaints of discomfort and fatigue
- Frequent eye rubbing or blinking
- Covering one eye
- Tilting the head to one side
- More at the American Optometric Association (AOA) [here](#).

AOA-recommended eye exam timeline

According to the AOA, a child's next eye exams should take place:

- At age 3
- Prior to kindergarten or first grade (age 5-6)
- Every 1-2 years thereafter

Children diagnosed with vision problems and prescribed corrective eyewear should have annual eye exams, especially if they wear contact lenses. If your child has special risk factors for eye problems, the eye doctor might recommend more frequent exams.

AOA: Because vision may change frequently during the school years, your child should receive an eye examination every year, or more frequently if specific problems or risk factors exist, or if recommended by your doctor of optometry.

School-aged children in a digital era

Over the years, there has been a dramatic increase in screen time — for both education and entertainment. Digital eye strain (DES), which results from too much screen time, affects over 50% of the population, impacting the lives of both children and adults. Children are going back to school soon, and proper vision care will be the most effective way to prevent DES. You and your children deserve to protect the future of your eye health.

Usually covered by insurance

Eye exams and corrective eyewear for children are now required essential benefits of health plans offered through state insurance exchanges. Discuss your health insurance plan with an eye care provider to determine the children's vision benefits your plan provides.

And be sure to add eye exams to your back-to-school "to-do" list. Making sure your children have excellent vision will help them perform at their best — in and out of the classroom.