

# Amblyopia in Children

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This material will help you understand amblyopia and how it is treated.

## What is amblyopia?

Amblyopia, often called “lazy eye,” occurs when one or both eyes do not develop normal vision during early childhood. It is a common vision problem that affects about 4% of children. If it is left untreated, it can lead to permanent vision loss.

## What causes amblyopia?

Children develop amblyopia when one or both of the eyes send blurry images to the brain. The brain does not learn how to see clear images even after a child wears glasses. There are several causes of amblyopia:

- Crossed eyes (strabismus) – This is the most common cause. When both eyes are not aimed in the same direction, the crossed eye “turns off.” The brain does this to avoid double vision. The child then only uses the better eye. If this continues over time, the crossed eye will not develop good vision.
- Unequal refractive error (anisometropia) – Amblyopia occurs when one eye has a very different glasses prescription from the other eye. It may also occur when both eyes have very strong glasses prescriptions. If one eye has a very strong glasses prescription and the other eye does not, the eye that needs the stronger prescription will “turn off”. That eye will not develop properly. It will always have poor vision. If a child is born needing very strong glasses prescriptions for both eyes and if he/she does not get glasses early on, neither eye will develop good vision.
- Other less common causes of amblyopia are early childhood eye disorders that prevent an image from being focused clearly on the back of the eye. One example is a droopy eyelid (ptosis) blocking vision.

Another example is a cataract or cloudy cornea blocking light from coming into the eye.

### **How is amblyopia treated?**

This first step in treating amblyopia is correcting the initial problem. Glasses can correct refractive errors. Eye crossing or wandering would need to be corrected. If your child has a cataract that is causing “lazy eye,” it can be removed through surgery. Your child’s eye doctor may also recommend treatments that force your child to use his/her weaker eye (“jumpstart the brain and eyes”), such as eye patching or eye drops. Treatment should be started as soon as possible to prevent long term vision loss. As your child grows older, treatment becomes less successful.

**For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.**



<http://www.aapos.org/terms/conditions/21>

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