

# What is 'lazy eye'?

August is Children's Eye Health and Safety Month. Lazy eye, also known as amblyopia, is the most common cause of vision impairment in children.



## AMBLYOPIA

Amblyopia means that the vision in one eye is reduced because of a problem with the brain and eye communication. Amblyopia is not a disease, but is a result of another vision problem. Usually, amblyopia can happen when a child has:



- Strabismus, which is when the two eyes can't work together to focus on one object. They may point in different directions. Strabismus may cause a crossed eye, known as esotropia. It may also cause one eye to turn outward, known as exotropia.
- One eye that is more nearsighted or farsighted.
- One eye that has an astigmatism and can't see as well as the other eye.
- A cataract in one eye that causes blurred vision.

In all of these cases, the brain can start to "ignore" the signals it gets from the weaker or blurred eye. It starts using the stronger eye by itself.

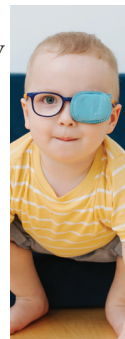
When the brain doesn't use one eye during childhood, the eye and brain connection doesn't develop well. Over time, the vision in the weaker eye gets worse because the proper brain connections were not formed.



## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

All children should get an eye exam before age 4. If there is a family history of amblyopia, childhood cataracts or other eye problems, get their eyes checked during infancy.

Treatment for amblyopia usually involves the child wearing an eye patch. They wear the patch over the stronger eye, forcing the brain to use the weaker eye. Your child's eye doctor will tell you how and when they should wear the patch.



It can be difficult for a child to get used to the eye patch. Try these tips:

- Use positive words to explain that the patch will help them see better.
- Allow them to pick out a color or design for their eye patch that they like.
- If the patch isn't a good solution for your child, ask the eye doctor about special drops that blur vision in the strong eye for the same effect. The blurring effect is temporary.

Don't wait! Getting amblyopia treated during childhood can help your child have good vision as an adult.

Sources: American Academy of Ophthalmology, National Eye Institute