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Children and Vision

Many people are confused about the importance of eyeglasses for children. Some believe that if children wear glasses when they are young, they will not need them later. Others think that wearing glasses as a child makes one dependent on them later. Neither is true. Some children need glasses because they are genetically nearsighted, farsighted, or astigmatic. These conditions generally do not go away nor do they get worse because they are not corrected. For people with refractive errors, eyeglasses or contacts are necessary throughout life for good vision.

Nearsightedness (when distant objects appear blurry) typically begins between the ages of eight and fifteen but can start earlier. **Farsightedness** is actually normal in young children and not a problem as long as it is mild. If a child is too farsighted, vision is blurry or the eyes cross when looking closely at things. This is usually apparent around the age of two. Almost everyone has some amount of **astigmatism** (oval instead of round cornea). Eyeglasses are required only if the astigmatism is strong.

Unlike adults, children who need glasses may develop a second problem, called **amblyopia** or lazy eye. Amblyopia means even with the right prescription, one eye (or sometimes both eyes) does not see normally. Amblyopia is more likely to occur if the prescription needed to correct one eye is stronger than the other or if the prescription in both eyes is very strong. Wearing eyeglasses can prevent amblyopia from developing or may treat amblyopia if already present.

Children (and adults) who do not see well with one eye because of amblyopia, or because of any other medical problem that cannot be corrected, should wear safety glasses to protect the normal eye.