

A lazy eye (amblyopia)

Information and advice for parents and carers

Orthoptics

What is a lazy eye?

A lazy eye, also known as amblyopia, is where the sight in the eye is underdeveloped, causing reduced vision.

What causes a lazy eye?

A lazy eye can be caused by a squint. A squint is where an eye turns and stops working with the other eye and is the most common cause of a lazy eye. A lazy eye can also be caused by one eye being more long or short-sighted than the other.

Another cause of lazy eye may be a physical obstruction of the vision in early years of life such as a droopy eye lid or cataract.

What are the symptoms of a lazy eye?

A lazy eye won't necessarily cause any symptoms and therefore may go undetected if the child's vision isn't tested formally.

How is a lazy eye diagnosed?

A lazy eye is diagnosed by an orthoptist examining your child's eye and assessing their vision.

How is a lazy eye treated?

A lazy eye can be treated with glasses and/or patching (occlusion therapy). Patching involves a patch being worn over the good eye, and if your child needs glasses these should be used at the same time as the patch. How much patching your child will need will depend on their age and how long the eye has been lazy.

Whilst your child is wearing the patch you should encourage them to read, draw or play with small toys as this will encourage their eye to work harder. If their sight is very poor it is best to play with things that are big and bright so that they can be seen more easily. If your child watches TV with the patch on they may need to sit closer to it to see properly.

If your child is having patching, they will need to see their orthoptist regularly so that their progress can be monitored.

What are the benefits of this treatment?

The benefit of patching the good eye is that the sight in their lazy eye will improve as it is forced to work harder. If patching is started at an early age it is usually successful. The benefit of wearing glasses for a lazy eye is that the glasses help the eye to focus properly.

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What are the risks of this treatment?

If your child wears the patch as instructed by their orthoptist the risks are minimal, but in some cases the vision in the other eye may reduce. Regular attendance for monitoring the progress is essential. There are no risks to wearing glasses.

What are the risks of not getting treatment?

If left untreated your child may have reduced sight which cannot be corrected when they are older.

Are there any alternative treatments?

An alternative treatment for a lazy eye is atropine therapy. This involves putting atropine eye drops or ointment into the good eye. The atropine blurs the vision in the good eye and encourages the lazy eye to work harder. Your child's orthoptist will discuss this with you if it is an appropriate treatment for your child.

There are no other alternatives to improve a lazy eye; simply using the eye makes the sight improve.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's vision please contact their orthoptist on one of the following numbers:

City Hospital

0121 507 6829

Sandwell Hospital

0121 507 3202

The orthoptics departments are open Monday – Thursday, 8.30am – 4.45pm and Friday, 8.30am – 3.30pm.

Further information

You may also find the following information leaflets useful; please ask your child's orthoptist for a copy if you would like one:

- Wearing glasses
- Squints

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website www.swbh.nhs.uk or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs.

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

Alec Ansons and Helen Davis, 'Diagnosis and management of ocular motility disorders', third edition, 2001

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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