

Amblyopia

Amblyopia, or “lazy eye,” is a childhood problem that happens when one eye is weaker than the other. The brain chooses to take in images from the stronger eye and ignore images from the weaker eye. This means that your child uses the strong eye more than the weak eye. If the weak eye doesn't have to work, it isn't able to develop good vision. This leads to poor vision in the weaker eye that cannot be corrected with eyeglasses. The condition is common and affects about 4 percent of people. Amblyopia is treatable only during the early childhood years.

Causes

Amblyopia is disorder in the brain caused by an eye problem. Imagine you are listening through broken headphones. Static comes through one side, and music through the other. After a short time, you “tune out” the static and hear only the music. The brain will also “tune out” or “turn off” an eye if an image is blurry in that eye. Most often this happens because of nearsightedness, farsightedness or astigmatism, but at times can be caused by cloudiness of tissues, such as a cataract. The other common cause of amblyopia is misalignment of the eyes (crossed eyes). In this condition, the brain pays notice to only one eye to stop the child from seeing double.

Symptoms and Detection

Amblyopia often has no symptoms. Unless there is misalignment or obvious problems, you may not know your child has decreased eyesight or is functionally blind in one eye. The best method for finding amblyopia is visual screening. All children should have their eyesight checked by trained staff at or before 3 years of age. Each eye must be checked one at a time. We also recommend having eyesight checked again around the age of 5. Of course, any child with a family history of serious

eye disease or childhood eye problems should be checked even earlier. Vision can be checked at any age.

Treatment

Since amblyopia is both a brain and eye problem, there are two phases of treatment. The eye problem that caused the amblyopia must be treated, but it does not undo the amblyopia. Glasses, surgery or other means may be needed to fix the eye problem, but the only way to fix amblyopia is to force the brain to “notice” to the weaker eye. Patching, special lenses or eye drops that blur eyesight in the “good” eye are common means of correcting amblyopia.

Amblyopia cannot be fixed after early childhood. For this reason, it is very important that eyesight is maximized during this early development period. Until your child reaches visual maturity, he or she may need ongoing maintenance patching. If you do not treat amblyopia, it could lead to: irreversible loss of eyesight in the weaker eye, loss of depth perception and fear of having only one “good” eye. If the “good” eye became injured or diseased, a lifetime of poor, uncorrectable eyesight may result.

Summary

- Amblyopia is a failure of normal development of eyesight due to various eye problems.
- It only occurs and can only be treated at a young age.
- It can have no symptoms, but should be detected by proper visual screening.
- Early detection followed by prompt, effective treatment is the best defense against this condition.