

## LAZY EYE (AMBLYOPIA)

### Q What is amblyopia?

A Amblyopia is a condition where a child's vision fails to develop properly. It usually occurs in one eye but can occur in both. Sometimes referred to as 'lazy eye', amblyopia affects about 1 in 25 children.

Although newborn babies have some vision, it is very poor compared to that of an adult. Vision develops rapidly over the first few months of life as the eyes and the brain develop, but is not fully developed until the age of approximately seven years.



During this period, it is vital that clear images are formed in both eyes and that the two eyes are well coordinated and there is no squint (one eye is incorrectly aligned). If there is a problem during this period, the vision may not develop properly and the child will have impaired vision (amblyopia) in the affected eye for the rest of their life.

### Q How does amblyopia affect your child's sight?

A If your child has amblyopia they will be unable to see clearly in the affected eye. However, if the other eye is normal they will be able to see quite clearly with both eyes open although they may have slight problems judging the distance of objects.

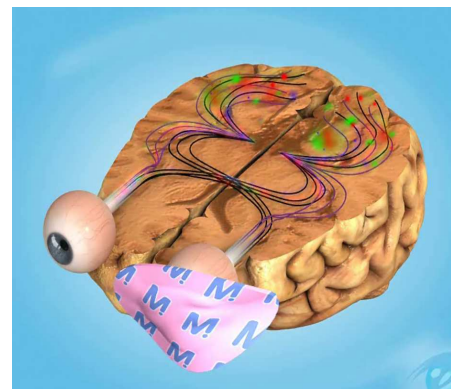
### Q What causes amblyopia?

A There are a number of eye disorders which can cause amblyopia.

- The most common cause is a squint (one eye is misaligned). To avoid double vision, the brain ignores the signals from the eye with a squint and therefore the vision in this eye fails to develop properly.
- Amblyopia can occur when one eye is out of focus as a result of being long-sighted, short-sighted or having astigmatism. Because this eye never receives a clear image, vision in this eye fails to develop to its full potential.
- Amblyopia can also occur when one or both eyes are deprived of a clear image as a result of a corneal ulcer or scar, congenital cataracts (clouding of the lens of the eye from birth), a droopy eyelid covering the pupil and various other eye conditions.

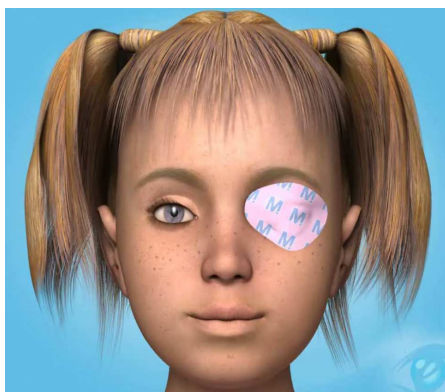
### Q What can be done to help?

A Amblyopia is treated by firstly ensuring that the obstacle to vision is removed and then making the affected eye work. The younger the child is when a lazy eye is diagnosed, the more successful treatment is likely to



be. If treatment is started after the age of eight, it is unlikely to be as successful.

Firstly, vision problems such as long or short sightedness are corrected using glasses. In some cases, the spectacles on their own will be adequate to make the amblyopic eye work. However, in most cases a patch will need to be worn over the good eye so that the lazy eye is forced to work harder. The length of time the child will need to wear the patch will depend on how old they are, and how serious the problem is. Most children will need to wear the patch for a few hours a day for several weeks. While the patch is on, the child should do close-up activities, such as colouring, reading or schoolwork. Patches can be worn with glasses.



In some cases your optometrist will be able to supervise this treatment. In other cases your child might be referred to an eye specialist or an orthoptist.

**Q What happens if I just ignore the fact that my child has a lazy eye?**

**A** If amblyopia is not treated at an early age, your child's central vision may not develop and the affected eye will never be able to see properly.

Provided that the other eye is normal, this will not have a huge impact on everyday activities. However, a number of occupations require a minimum standard of vision in each eye which may prevent your child

entering this occupation. Also, if your child loses their good eye as a result of an accident or disease, they will be visually impaired.

In view of this it is strongly recommended that all children have an eye examination by the age of 4 so that any signs of amblyopia can be detected and treated.