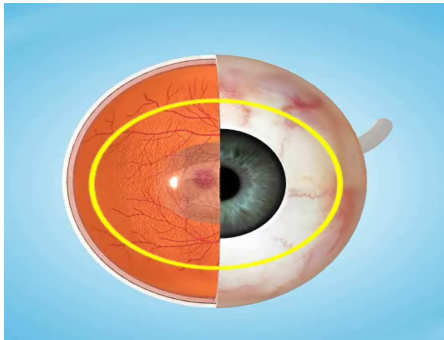# ASTIGMATISM

Q   What is astigmatism?

A   Astigmatism occurs when the cornea (the clear window at the front of the eye) or the lens (the clear structure which lies just behind the pupil) is shaped like a rugby ball – more curved in one direction than the other. This means that objects at some orientations will be more sharply in focus than objects at other orientations – particularly objects with straight lines. The overall effect is that distant **and** near objects will look blurred – the degree of blurring depending on the amount of astigmatism.

Q   Who suffers from astigmatism?

A   Most people with astigmatism are born with the condition, although it can develop throughout life. Usually, a person with astigmatism will have other visual problems such as short or long sightedness. Astigmatism is an extremely common condition affecting most people to some degree, although in many cases its effects are too small to require correction.

Q   What causes astigmatism?

A   In most cases, astigmatism is present at birth as the size and shape of the eye is developed in the womb. It may be due to environmental and genetic factors but the exact cause isn't known. Sometimes astigmatism can develop after an eye injury, surgery or eye disease.

Astigmatism is not caused by factors such as reading in poor light, constant squinting or watching too much television.

Q   What treatment is available?

A   Astigmatism can usually be corrected with spectacles or contact lenses. The lenses used to correct astigmatism have two different curves at right angles to each other and are therefore highly customised for your eyes.

Hard (RGP) or Toric soft contact lenses are usually effective for correcting astigmatism. Your optometrist will be able to advise on the best solution for your eyes.

Surgery to correct astigmatism is available. It works by altering the shape of the cornea so that the eye focuses correctly. A range of surgical procedures are available and most involve the use of a laser.