

## SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS (MYOPIA)

### Q What is short-sightedness?

A Short-sightedness affects almost a third of the population. It occurs when either the eye ball is too long from front to back or when the cornea (the clear part of the front of the eye) is too steeply curved. The result is that there is a mismatch between the length of the eye and the focusing power of the cornea and lens and as a result the light comes to a focus before reaching the back of the eye (retina).

The main symptom of short-sightedness is difficulty seeing objects in the distance - near objects can usually be seen clearly. Other symptoms can include headaches and eyestrain.



### Q Who gets it?

A Short-sightedness usually appears around puberty, but may appear at any age from early childhood up to 25 years of age. In most cases, short-sightedness will stop getting worse when the growth process has been completed. The earlier short-sightedness starts, the more severe it is likely to become.

### Q What causes short-sightedness?

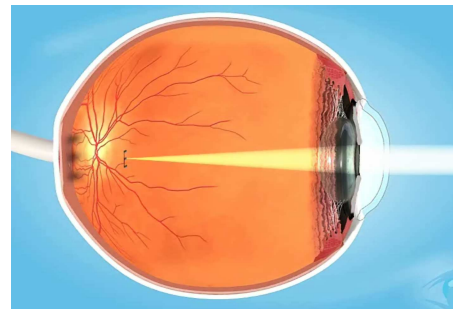
A There is a tendency for short-sightedness to run in families. Children have about a 30% chance of developing short-sightedness if one of their parents has the condition, and a 55% chance if both have it.

There is some evidence that environmental factors such as close work play a part in the development

of short-sightedness, at least in those who are genetically susceptible.

### Q What treatment is available?

A Short-sightedness can usually be corrected with spectacles or contact lenses. The lenses used to correct short-sightedness are thicker at the edges than at the centre which bends the light entering the eye so that the focus is pushed back onto the retina.



Surgery to correct myopia 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.

### Q Are there any complications?

A Most people have mild myopia and there are no serious complications. People who are more short-sighted often experience floaters (little black dots floating across your vision) and are at increased risk of a retinal detachment. If you are in this category, your optometrist may advise you to avoid certain sports and activities and to report to an eye department if you ever notice flashing lights, a sudden increase in floaters or a "curtain" coming down over your vision.