

Strabismus

What is Strabismus?

The movement of each eye is controlled by six eye muscles that work in pairs. When one eye muscle contracts (tightens), its partner relaxes and the eye moves in the desired direction. If one eye's muscle is out of balance (i.e. underacting or overacting) the affected eye will not move with the unaffected eye. This is known as strabismus.

How does it affect vision?

When the eyes do not co-ordinate, each eye is seeing a different image to the other. This is confusing to the brain and it shuts out the image received from the 'turned' eye. This is called suppression and the child effectively uses only one eye (i.e. the 'good' eye). If the eye is not straightened early, before the child's visual system has stopped developing the eye will never develop 'normal' vision.

Who is most at risk?

The exact cause of strabismus is not known and it can occur later in life, not just in childhood.

How can it be treated?

Treatment for strabismus will depend on the underlying cause.

Patching (or occlusion) of the good eye may be recommended by the Ophthalmologist to stimulate the turned eye and develop the child's vision to a useful level.

Surgery may be an appropriate treatment if the strabismus is caused by a problem with the muscles of the eye. This involves the doctor repositioning the muscles of the eye so that they can face a more forwards direction.

How does it progress with age?

If childhood strabismus is not treated early it may result in the turned eye never developing normal vision.

Adapted from Strabismus by the Health Central Network and R.S. Douglas M.D.



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