

turn a blind eye to their children's vision-related complaints. If ignored, these easily curable conditions can cause permanent damage, city doctors tell **Nidhi Bhushan**

Eye on the problem



When 21-year old Sujit Kumar* completed his graduation, he was selected by a most sought-after company. Needless to say, he was overjoyed. However, Kumar's happiness was short-lived. His routine pre-employment medical check-up showed that he had amblyopia, or lazy eye, in his left eye.

"Amblyopia results when one eye has normal vision and the other has long-sightedness or short-sightedness. The brain prefers to use the stronger eye, ignoring the weaker eye," says Dr Arun Samprathi, pediatric ophthalmologist and squint specialist, Samprathi Eye Hospital & Squint Centre.

The problem was accentuated because of late diagnosis. Even though Kumar had long-sightedness (hypermetropia) since birth, it wasn't discovered early enough. He went through school and college with ease since his brain had become accustomed to seeing with only one eye. It was only at his pre-employment medical check that the condition was diagnosed.

Unfortunately, not much can be done for Kumar because of his age. In case of eye conditions, the problem is best treated before the child crosses the age of visual maturation (first 8-10 years of life).

Sunday DNA examines a few such eye problems.

Allergic Conjunctivitis

"There are different types of conjunctivitis — viral, bacterial and allergic. While the viral and bacterial type can spread to others through touch, allergic conjunctivitis does-

n't," says Dr AR Anand, ophthalmologist, Sudharshana Nethralaya, adding that this problem is very common in Bangalore because of the pollutants in the air.

SYMPTOMS: "Reddish colour of the eyes is the most common symptom," says Dr Ajanta Chakravarty, consultant ophthalmologist and HOD, Manipal Hospital.

CARE FACTOR: "Most people use basic eye drops, available over the counter, for all eye problems among their children. This practice should be avoided and a doctor should be consulted," says Dr S Kiran, MD, paediatrics, practising at a clinic in HSR Layout.

Excessive watering

Almost 60-80% children suffer from excessive watering of the eyes. "This problem can occur due to normal delivery of the baby," says Dr Kiran, adding that while the baby is being delivered, the pressure can cause a few blockages in and around the eyes.

SYMPTOMS: Constant tear-formation.

CARE FACTOR: This should not be ignored as it can cause a permanently blocked tear duct and childhood glaucoma. Parents should avoid medicating children on their own.

Refractive errors

This includes short-sightedness, long-sightedness and astigmatism. "Most parents believe that it is the TV that is the culprit for their child's short-sightedness. However, they should realise that a child goes closer to the TV or any other object only because he or she is having trouble with her sight in the first place," says Dr Chakravarty.

SYMPTOMS: Children find it hard to read from a distance if they suffer from short-sightedness. However, if a child is suffering from long-sightedness, he or she often looks tired. Headache is the most common symptom of long-sightedness.

CARE FACTOR: Every child should be taken for a regular eye check-up as refractive errors can lead to amblyopia or lazy eye.

Childhood Cataract

"Even though childhood cataract is quite a rare phenomenon, some children may suffer from it since birth or get it while they are growing up," says Dr Chakravarty.

SYMPTOMS: "Usually, one eye becomes whitish, making it look a little unclear," says Dr Jagdish Chinnappa, consultant paediatrician, Manipal Hospital. Even though cataract doesn't cause any pain, the problem is easily detectable in most cases.

CARE FACTOR: "If cataract is neglected, it can lead to visual impairment," says Dr Chinnappa.

Congenital Glaucoma

Three-month-old Rohini Sharma* had an unusually big left eye. She couldn't tolerate exposure to bright lights and suffered from excessive watering in the enlarged eye. "When Rohini was brought to us, we found that she had a high intraocular pressure, a condition called congenital glaucoma, in her left eye. She was immediately taken for surgery to reduce her eye pressure and prevent further damage to her vision," says Dr Samprathi.

SYMPTOMS: The most common symptoms

are excessive watering of the infected eye, intolerance to bright lights and the black of the infected eye becoming exceptionally large.

CARE FACTOR: "Unfortunately with glaucoma, the vision already lost cannot be restored. But, one can always prevent further damage," says Dr Chinnappa. "Congenital glaucoma will definitely lead to blindness if not treated within the first few months."

Squints

Since birth, Shreya* had had a squint in her right eye. But, Shreya was finally taken to the clinic when she was four. It was then found that she was going blind in the affected eye. The squint had been caused by long-sightedness. "Shreya was prescribed glasses without wasting much time and her squint was corrected," says Dr Samprathi.

SYMPTOMS: Squints are fairly easy to detect as they are visible to everyone. "Squints that are caused by refractive errors, mostly long-sightedness, can be cured by prescription glasses," says Dr Samprathi, adding that other squints need to be surgically treated.

CARE FACTOR: "Squints should be treated as early as possible. If not, they can become permanent and can also lead to lazy eye," says Dr Chinnappa. "Squints should be treated to ensure that the child develops 3D vision (or depth perception)," Dr Samprathi says.

**Names changed on request*