

THE WONDERS of the world are first encountered through the eyes of a child. Yet, without good vision, a child's ability to learn about the world becomes difficult.

Vision problems affect one in 20 pre-schoolers and one in four school-going children. Since most vision problems have their origin in early childhood, it is very important

SAVE YOUR

that children receive proper eye care. Untreated eye problems can worsen and lead to other serious problems as well as affect their learning ability and lead to personality and adjustment issues in school. A child's eye becomes fully 'mature' by the age of eight or 10. Hence, childhood disorders should not be neglected and left to chance. Proper care and due medical attention at this age can prevent permanent loss of vision.

It is recommended that school-going children have a complete medical examination by their fourth birthday and routine eye examination approximately every two years thereafter. Parents should be aware of signs which may indicate that their child has vision problems, including

Wandering or 'cross' eyes

- ❑ A family history of childhood vision problems
- ❑ Disinterest in reading or viewing distant objects
- ❑ Squinting or turning the head in an unusual manner while watching television
- ❑ Watching television, up close

- ❑ Poor handwriting; slow writing speed; difficulty with maths; not being able to put information in order

Common eye problems

Refractive errors

Refractive errors can cause eye strain or a decrease in vision. They can be corrected by wearing glasses or contact lenses. Hyperopia (farsightedness or the inability to focus on

objects at close range) can make children cross eyed.

Myopia (nearsightedness or the inability to see objects clearly that are far away) is common in older children.

Amblyopia

Amblyopia, or 'lazy eye', occurs when there is vision abnormality during early childhood. It can occur due to a number of underlying causes such as squint, refractive

errors, etc. It is often difficult to detect in the early stages since the child's eyes may seem absolutely normal from a layperson's point of view.

Glasses or eye-strengthening patches are used for treatment, which is most effective in preventing loss of vision when initiated at a very early age.

Allergic conjunctivitis

Eye allergies are common in children. They cause redness, itching and watering of the eyes. Avoidance of exposure to dust is the most important and difficult part of treatment. Steroid eye drops are sometimes prescribed in severe cases and should be used only under the guidance of a doctor.

Strabismus (squint)

Strabismus is a malalignment of the eyes which causes them to point in different directions. Strabismus affects around four per cent of children in the USA. Glasses or an eye patch are also used to treat the condition. However, surgery may be required in some cases. ■



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