

## **A Vision for Protecting Your Child's Eyesight**

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Vision is so important for academic performance and daily life! It's the perfect time to focus on all that can be done to protect and maximize your child's vision because a lack of eye-health can be at the expense of a student's academic, social, and general performance potential.

Long before the baby's birth, it's vital for the expecting mother to take care of herself by eating a healthy diet and taking prenatal vitamins. Vitamin A is especially important for healthy development of the infant's eyes. Important sources of Vitamin A are leafy vegetables, carrots, some fruits and dairy products. These foods are important to maintain eye health for the growing child, as well as teens and adults.

Surprisingly, the developing baby's eyes can sense light versus dark, and exposure of the gentle light which filters through the Mom's abdomen enhances fetal eye development, so it is good for the expectant Mom to enjoy time both indoors and outdoors. Also, expectant Mothers should follow the gynecologists recommendations to avoid any infections that could cause congenital blindness.

After birth, the baby's vision develops rapidly. The newborn can see best at the depth of about 8-10 inches; this is just right to begin to enjoy Mommy's face from the breast-feeding position. At first the eyes may not be coordinated and may not track together, but if an eye appears to constantly turn in or out, an evaluation is warranted, especially if this persists beyond 2 months old. By 3 months, your child should be able to follow moving objects; by 5 months depth perception is much better.

If your infant has a white pupil, or if photos only have one eye with a red pupil effect, you should have your infant's eyes checked right away. Your baby's doctor will also carefully check the eyes, eye movements, and all other systems at 'well visit' routine check-ups. If there is any concern about a problem, your child should see an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

There are also many fun things a parent can do to stimulate healthy childhood eye development. For newborns, talk to your baby and make a variety of facial expressions. As your child grows, brightly colored toys and mobiles can help the eyes begin to focus on individual, smaller items and can help with depth perception. Beginning around 9 months old, it can be useful to roll a ball back and forth with your child; this helps further develop depth perception. Crawling has been shown to enhance hand-eye coordination, so let your child get down on the floor and explore.

Other ways to provide your child with healthy visual stimuli is to spend time outdoors; this reduces the risk of myopia (near-sightedness). If already near-sighted, spending at least 14 hours per week outside may help prevent progression. Conversely, staring at a screen for long periods

of time without a break can increase the risk of myopia, cause headaches, blurry vision from eye fatigue, and light sensitivity; this is known as Computer Vision Syndrome.

Conversely, some studies have shown playing video games can improve hand-eye coordination. Action-oriented video games can boost visual attention and visual reaction time. These action games have also been shown to protect and improve visual contrast sensitivity, which is often lost as adults grow older. Visual contrast sensitivity is especially important for night vision. The key when using video games, computers, or other screens is to have your child learn to position properly and to limit the time spent on screens. The player should be 6-10 feet from the TV screen with knees at 90° angles. If using a computer, the very top of the monitor should be at about eye level. The player should take breaks away from the screen every 20-30 minutes. In addition, screens should be situated to reduce glare. Screen time should be limited to 2 hours per day maximum.

Finally, be wise about eye protection. Choose age-appropriate toys without sharp, pointy parts which could cause injury. As the child grows, teach them the importance of wearing goggles or eye protection at appropriate times, such as when playing a sport which could increase the risk of eye injury. Of course, when the setting is bright, it is important to have your child wear sunglasses and/or a hat; too much bright sun can increase the risk of cataracts as an adult.

It is said the **eyes** are the mirror of the soul and the doorway to your heart. They reflect your emotions and your inner being, so be proactive in keeping them healthy!

Sources:

[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) (currently has 144 articles available for parents regarding pediatric vision; you might check out the top few)

“Action Video Games Improve Vision.” <https://www.rochester.edu/news/show.php?id=3342>

“Video Game Vision Syndrome: A New Clinical Picture in Children?” by Caterina Rechichi, Gilda De Mojà, and Pasquale Aragona. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28850642/>

“Vision Development: Childhood,” by David Turbert. <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/children-vision-development>