

## **Patient information factsheet**

### **Glasses for children**

This leaflet tries to answer the questions you may have about your child's glasses. Please ask your orthoptist, eye doctor or optometrist if you have any other questions.

#### **How do you test if a child needs glasses?**

To check whether a young child needs glasses, eye drops called cyclopentolate are put into each eye. The drops make the pupils large and stop the eyes from changing focus for a few hours. The effect of the drops wears off after this time. The doctor or optometrist holds lenses in front of the eyes and shines a light from an instrument called a retinoscope through these lenses. This allows the doctor or optometrist to tell if glasses are needed and what strength they should be.

#### **Why are glasses needed?**

Children may need glasses for long-sight, short-sight or astigmatism, in one or both eyes. If the problem is slight then the child's eyes may be able to adjust to it and glasses may not be needed. If there is a larger amount of long-sight, short-sight or astigmatism or if the orthoptist's examination shows that the eyes are not coping well with it, then glasses may be needed.

The orthoptist, optometrist or eye doctor will explain the reason for glasses in your child's case.

#### **Long-sight**

In a long-sighted eye, light is not focused strongly enough causing a blurred image on the retina (layer of light sensitive cells) at the back of the eye. The vision will be blurred at all distances but will be worse for near objects. Often children with long-sight will try to see clearly by focusing using the lens inside the eye. Children with small amounts of long-sight may be able to do this without any difficulty. Children with greater amounts of long-sight may not be able to focus enough to get clear vision or the focusing may cause eyestrain or a squint (a turn in the eye), so that glasses are needed to help with the focusing.

#### **Short-sight**

In a short-sighted eye, light is focused too strongly causing a blurred image on the retina. The blurred vision will be worse for distant objects and many children with short-sight will see close objects quite clearly. Glasses for short-sight change the focusing of the light so that it is clearly focused on the retina.

#### **Astigmatism**

In an eye with astigmatism, the front of the eye is not perfectly round in shape. Often an eye with astigmatism is described as being shaped like a rugby ball and a

normally sighted eye as being shaped like a football. The uneven shape of an eye with astigmatism means that it is not able to focus all the light evenly in one place causing a blur on the retina. The vision will be blurred for near and distance objects. Astigmatism can occur on its own or together with long-sight or short-sight. Glasses for astigmatism change the focusing of the light so that it is all focused evenly in one place.

## **Visual development**

A child's visual system develops from birth until about eight years of age. If a child has significant long-sight, short-sight or astigmatism during this time the blurred vision can prevent the visual system from developing properly. It is important that visual development is completed normally during the first eight years and this makes it especially important that children who need glasses wear them during this time.

## **What happens if my child needs glasses?**

Once the orthoptist and the eye doctor or optometrist have assessed your child's eyes and found that glasses are needed, they will discuss this with you and give you a glasses voucher (called an HES voucher). You need to take the voucher to an optician to have the glasses ordered. The voucher tells the optician what power the glasses need to be and also pays a set amount towards the cost of the glasses.

You can take the voucher either to the hospital optician or to any optician's shop to choose the glasses. The value of the voucher depends on the strength of your child's glasses. The voucher should cover the cost of basic lenses. Some glasses frames will be fully covered by the voucher value, whilst you will need to pay extra for some frames.

## **How do I choose the glasses frame?**

The optician will measure your child's face and advise you on the best type of glasses frame.

Children should only have plastic lenses in their glasses to help make the glasses as light and safe as possible. Your optician will advise you about this.

If there are any problems with the fit of the glasses you should go back to the optician as soon as possible to have them adjusted.

You will be given an appointment for a review with the orthoptist six to eight weeks after the glasses have been ordered. If you need any advice before this please contact the Orthoptic Department – phone number below.

## **When should the glasses be worn?**

We will advise you on when your child should wear their glasses. In most cases children should wear their glasses as much as possible.

If your child is at nursery or school you should let the teacher know about the glasses. Depending on the strength of the glasses it may be best to leave them off for sports and at playtime. You should discuss this with the school and with your

orthoptist, optometrist or eye doctor. For older children who find that they cannot manage without their glasses for sports, it is possible to buy special safety sports glasses.

### **How can I help my child to settle into the glasses?**

Many children settle into wearing their glasses quickly but for some children it may take longer. To start with, try putting the glasses on at times when they are doing something they enjoy, for example watching television. If your child takes the glasses off give them a rest and try again later. Your support and encouragement are very important in helping your child to accept the glasses.

### **Will be glasses be needed long-term?**

We will advise you about how long your child is likely to need glasses for. Some children will need to continue wearing their glasses long-term whilst others may be able to wear the glasses less, or even stop wearing them as they get older. This will depend on the strength of the glasses and whether they are needed for long-sight, short-sight and/or astigmatism.

Significant long-sight is usually caused by the eye being very slightly smaller than average for the child's age. As the eye grows the long-sight may improve. Whether it can improve enough for glasses to be stopped depends on how much long-sight was there to start with – we will advise you about this.

Short-sight is usually caused by the eye being slightly larger than average for the child's age and it may increase as the eyes grow. So once a child needs glasses for short-sight they are likely to need them long-term.

Astigmatism does not usually change much as the eyes grow so once a child needs glasses for astigmatism they are likely to need them long-term.

Once visual development is complete, at about eight years of age, it is sometimes possible to give children more choice in how much they wear the glasses, although children with strong glasses are likely to continue to need them most of the time.

### **What happens if the glasses get broken or lost?**

If your child's glasses get broken or lost please contact the optician who provided the glasses to organise repair or replacement.

The hospital is not able to provide vouchers for spare glasses other than in exceptional cases.

Try to encourage your child to look after their glasses. They should try to:

- Use both hands to take the glasses off
- Try not to put the glasses down on the lens surface
- Keep the glasses in a case when not being worn

### **What about sunglasses?**

Other than in exceptional cases (when there is a medical condition which make the eyes extra sensitive to sunlight) the hospital is not able to provide vouchers for sunglasses. However you can purchase prescription sunglasses for your child if you wish.

### **Can children have contact lenses?**

For most children contact lenses are not advised before the mid-teens. Some children who play a lot of sport can try contact lenses earlier than this to wear just for sports.

### **Is laser surgery an option?**

Laser surgery to correct short-sight and long-sight is currently only routinely used in adults.

**If you have any questions about your child's glasses, please ask your orthoptist, eye doctor or optometrist.**

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**For a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688.**

Version: 1.0  
Author: Elizabeth O'Flynn, Deputy Head Orthoptist  
Issue Date: February 2011  
Review Date: February 2014