

Glasses for children

Information for patients, parents and guardians

We have given you this factsheet because your child has an appointment to see if they need glasses. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your child's eye doctor, optometrist or optician.

Why may my child need glasses?

The images we see are made up of light reflected from the objects we look at. When we look at an object, light rays from the object pass through the eye to reach the retina (the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye). Special cells of the retina turn the light rays into electrical signals, which are sent down the optic nerve to the vision centres in the brain. The brain then processes these electrical signals to create a clear picture of the object.

If your child has smaller or larger eyes than normal, or if the shape of their eyes is irregular, they may not be able to focus light onto the retina properly. This can cause the following eyesight problems (in one or both eyes):

- long-sightedness (where close objects appear blurred but distant objects may be seen more clearly)
- short-sightedness (where distant objects appear blurred but close objects may be seen more clearly)
- astigmatism (where all objects appear blurred)

If your child's eyesight problem is mild, their eyes may be able to adjust to it as their vision naturally develops. However, if the problem is more severe, they may need glasses to correct their blurred vision. We will explain this to you in more detail during your child's appointment.

Long-sightedness

Long-sightedness affects a person's ability to see nearby objects. If your child has a low level of long-sightedness, they may be able to see distant objects quite clearly, but objects up close may appear out of focus or blurry. If they have a high level of long-sightedness, both near and distant objects will appear blurry.

This eyesight problem can occur if the eyeball is too short or if the lens is too thin, as this prevents the eye from focusing the light rays onto the retina properly. This causes a blurred image on the retina and makes doing things up close difficult and more tiring for the eyes, as they have to work harder to see. This extra effort to focus can cause eye strain and a squint (a turn in the eye) if not treated.

Long-sightedness can usually be corrected easily by wearing prescription glasses. Depending on the level of long-sightedness, some children may be able to stop wearing glasses as their eyes grow. We will advise you about this at your child's review appointments.

Short-sightedness

Short-sightedness affects a person's ability to see distant objects. If your child has short-sightedness, they may be able to see close objects clearly, but objects in the distance will appear out of focus or blurry.

This eyesight problem can occur if the eyeball is too long or if the lens is too thick, as this prevents the light rays from focusing on the retina properly and causes them to focus just in front of the retina. This causes a blurred image on the retina.

Short-sightedness can usually be corrected easily by wearing prescription glasses. If your child needs glasses for short-sightedness, they are likely to need them for the rest of their life. This is because short-sightedness can increase as a child's eyes continue to grow.

Astigmatism

Astigmatism affects a person's ability to see objects clearly. If your child has astigmatism, their vision will be blurred for near and distant objects. Astigmatism can occur on its own, or together with long-sightedness or short-sightedness.

Astigmatism is when the front of the eye is not perfectly round. A normal eye is shaped like a football, but an eye with astigmatism is often described as being the shape of a rugby ball. The uneven shape of the eye means that it is not able to focus all the light evenly in one place, which causes a blur on the retina.

Astigmatism can usually be corrected easily by wearing prescription glasses. If your child needs glasses for astigmatism, they are likely to need them for the rest of their life. This is because astigmatism does not usually change much as a child's eyes grow.

Visual development

A child's vision continues to develop from birth up until they are around eight years of age. If your child has significant long-sightedness, short-sightedness or astigmatism during this time, their blurred vision can prevent their vision from developing properly. To ensure your child has the best possible vision later in life, it is important that their eyesight develops as normally as possible during their first eight years.

If your child needs glasses and does not wear them, there is a risk that their eyesight will not develop normally, which may mean they never develop the ability to see well.

What will happen at the glasses test appointment?

At your child's appointment, we will put some eye drops called Cyclopentolate into each of your child's eyes. The drops will make your child's pupils large and stop their eyes from changing focus for a few hours. We will then hold lenses in front of your child's eyes and use an instrument called a retinoscope to shine a bright light through the lenses into their eyes to see how their eyes react. This will allow us to determine whether your child needs glasses, and if they do, what strength the glasses need to be.

What happens if my child needs glasses?

If your child needs glasses, we will discuss what happens next with you in more detail. We will also give you an NHS optical voucher. This is a voucher that helps towards the cost of a pair of glasses. The value of the voucher will depend on the strength of your child's glasses. It should cover the cost of the lenses and may also cover the cost of the frames. You can take this voucher to any optician of your choice, as long as they accept NHS optical vouchers.

We will also book your child in for a review appointment. This will usually be two to six months after you've ordered your child's glasses. If you need any advice before this, please contact us.

Choosing glasses

Before you choose a pair of glasses for your child, your optician will measure your child's face and advise you on the best type of glasses frame for them. Children's glasses should have plastic lenses, so they are as light and as safe as possible. Your optician will advise you about this.

Take your child with you when you collect their glasses so that the optician can check the fit and ensure that their eyes are looking through the correct part of the lenses.

If you notice any problems with the way the glasses fit, take your child back to the optician to have their glasses adjusted, or contact us for advice as soon as possible.

When should my child wear their glasses?

We will advise you on when your child should wear their glasses. However, we usually advise children to wear their glasses as much as possible.

If your child is at nursery or school, it is important that you let their teacher know about their glasses. Depending on the strength of your child's glasses, we may recommend that they take them off for sports and at playtime. For older children who find that they cannot manage without their glasses for sports, you can buy special safety sports glasses.

How can I help my child to settle into wearing glasses?

Many children settle into wearing their glasses quickly, but for some children it may take longer. Try putting your child's glasses on when they are doing something they enjoy, such as watching television. If they take the glasses off, give them a rest and then try again later. It is very important that you support and encourage your child to wear their glasses as much as possible.

How long will my child need to wear glasses for?

The length of time your child will need to wear glasses for will depend on the strength of the glasses and what they are needed for. Some children will need to wear glasses for the rest of their lives, while other children may be able to stop wearing their glasses as they get older. We will let you know how long your child is likely to need glasses for during their review appointments.

Depending on the strength of a child's glasses, it is sometimes possible to give them more choice in how much they wear the glasses once their vision is fully developed.

What happens if my child breaks or loses their glasses?

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

We are not able to provide vouchers for spare glasses other than in exceptional circumstances. For this reason, we recommend encouraging your child to look after their glasses. You can do this by making sure your child:

- always uses both hands when putting their glasses on or taking them off
- keeps their glasses in a case when they're not wearing them
- never puts their glasses face down (on the surface of the lens)

Can my child have prescription sunglasses?

You can purchase prescription sunglasses for your child. The hospital is not able to provide vouchers for prescription sunglasses, unless your child has a medical condition that causes their eyes to be extra sensitive to sunlight.

Can children wear contact lenses?

There is no age limit for wearing contact lenses. However, contact lenses are not available from the eye unit unless they are medically necessary.

Younger children who play a lot of sport can try contact lenses for sports only.

Is laser surgery an option?

Laser surgery to correct long-sightedness and short-sightedness is only routinely available for adults.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's glasses, please contact us.

Orthoptic department

Telephone: **023 8120 4789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm)

Hospital optician

Telephone: **023 8120 5708** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm)

This is a service for people who have purchased their glasses from the hospital optician.

Useful links

www.squintclinic.com

www.nhs.uk/conditions/long-sightedness

www.nhs.uk/conditions/short-sightedness

www.nhs.uk/conditions/astigmatism

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Version 2. Published July 2021. Due for review July 2024. 1775