

Patient information factsheet

Squint in children

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been diagnosed with a squint. We hope that it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions, please ask your child's orthoptist (someone trained to diagnose eye problems) or eye doctor.

What is a squint?

A squint is when an eye turns or wanders so that it does not always work together with the other eye. The eye may turn inwards, outwards or occasionally upwards or downwards. The eye may not turn all of the time. For example, the squint may only be noticeable when your child is tired or concentrating. The medical term for a squint is strabismus.

What causes a squint?

It is not always possible to tell why a child has a squint. The most common causes of squints in children are:

- **Long sight:** An inward-turning squint is often caused by long sight. A child who is long-sighted may try to see clearly by focusing their eyes and this may cause one eye to turn inwards.
- **Eye muscle imbalance:** There are six muscles around each eye. If these muscles are not well balanced, it may cause one eye to turn.
- **A period of illness:** Sometimes a squint is first noticed after the child has been unwell. In most cases, the squint would have developed in time anyway, but an illness may bring it out quicker.
- **Genetics:** Squints can run in families. Many children with a squint have a close relative who also has or had a squint.

Why does the squint matter?

The sight in the eye with the squint may not develop normally because the eye is not being used properly. This is called a lazy eye (amblyopia).

Some squints can make it difficult to tell where the eyes are looking.

The squint may make it difficult for the eyes to work together and this may reduce the child's 3D (depth) vision. This does not usually cause children any problems in their everyday lives, but it may prevent them from following certain career paths. For example, they may not be able to become a lorry driver, firefighter or pilot.

Treating a squint

Some very young babies have intermittent squints that get better by the age of three months. If your child still has a squint after three months of age, you should get it checked by an orthoptist and an eye doctor.

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Most children will need one or more of the following forms of treatment:

- **Glasses:** Many children with a squint will need to wear glasses, especially those who are long-sighted. The long-sighted glasses help the eyes to focus and may stop the eye turning inwards. You may still notice the squint when your child takes off the glasses.
- **Patching or atropine eye drops:** If your child has reduced sight in the squinting eye, they can wear a patch over the stronger eye to improve the sight in the weak eye. Alternatively, you can put atropine eye drops into the stronger eye to temporarily blur the vision and strengthen the sight in the weaker eye. The patch or atropine only help to improve the vision in the lazy eye and do not treat the squint itself. It is important to improve the vision before the squint can be treated.
- **Operation:** If your child does not need glasses, or if glasses do not correct the squint, they may benefit from an operation on the muscles that move the eyes. The operation straightens the eyes by improving the balance of the eye muscles.

Your orthoptist and doctor will discuss the best treatments for your child with you.

Meeting the eye care team

The orthoptist is trained to assess and treat squints. They will find out what type of squint your child has, check your child's vision and advise you if your child needs a patch.

The eye doctor (ophthalmologist) will check that your child's eyes are healthy and test to see if they need glasses. The ophthalmologist will advise you if your child needs an operation on the eye muscles.

The optometrist (optician) in the hospital may test to see if your child needs glasses. An optometrist, either in the hospital or in an optician's shop, will help you to choose glasses for your child. The optometrist will order the glasses, and check and adjust the fit.

Useful links

For further information on squints, please visit the squint clinic: www.squintclinic.com

Contact us

Orthoptic department

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

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