

Amblyopia (Lazy Eye)

Amblyopia, also known as lazy eye, is a vision development disorder in which an eye fails to achieve normal visual acuity, even with prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses.

Amblyopia begins during infancy and early childhood. In most cases, only one eye is affected. But in some cases, reduced visual acuity can occur in both eyes.

Particularly if lazy eye is detected early in life and promptly treated, reduced vision can be avoided. But if left untreated, lazy eye can cause severe visual disability in the affected eye, including legal blindness, especially if not treated by age 10.

Amblyopia Signs and Symptoms

Because amblyopia typically is a problem of infant vision development, symptoms of the condition can be difficult to discern. However, a common cause of amblyopia is strabismus. So if you notice your baby or young child has crossed eyes or some other apparent eye misalignment, schedule an appointment for a children's eye exam immediately — preferably with an ophthalmologist like Dr. Lothes who specializes in children's vision.

Another clue that your child may have amblyopia is if he or she cries or fusses when you cover one eye. This may suggest that the eye you have covered is the "good" eye, and that the uncovered eye is amblyopic, causing blurred vision. Another symptom is closing the misaligned eye while out in the sunshine.

What Causes Amblyopia?

Strabismus is the most common cause of amblyopia. To avoid double vision caused by poorly aligned eyes, the brain ignores the visual input from the misaligned eye, leading to amblyopia in that eye (the "lazy eye"). This type of amblyopia is called strabismic amblyopia.

Sometimes, amblyopia is caused by unequal refractive errors in the two eyes, despite perfect eye alignment. For example, one eye may have significant uncorrected nearsightedness or farsightedness, while the other eye does not. Or one eye may have significant astigmatism and the other eye does not.

In such cases, the brain relies on the eye that has less uncorrected refractive error and "tunes out" the blurred vision from the other eye, causing amblyopia in that eye from disuse. This type of amblyopia is called refractive amblyopia (or anisometropic amblyopia).

Amblyopia Treatment



In some cases of refractive amblyopia, normal vision can be achieved simply by fully correcting the refractive errors in both eyes with glasses or contact lenses. Usually, however, at least some patching of the "good" eye is needed to force the brain to pay attention to the visual input from the amblyopic eye and enable normal vision development to occur in that eye. Patching may be required for several hours each day or even all day long and may continue for weeks or months.

Another means of treating amblyopia is to dilate the good eye with drops causing the good eye's vision to blur. This causes the patient to utilize their "weak eye" to a much greater extent.

Amblyopia (Lazy Eye) (Continued)

Treatment of strabismic amblyopia often involves strabismus surgery to straighten the eyes, followed by eye patching and often some form of vision therapy (also called orthoptics) to help both eyes work together equally as a team.

Early Detection and Treatment is Important

Though modern amblyopia treatments might improve vision in older children and adults, most experts agree that early detection and treatment of lazy eye is preferred for normal visual development and the best visual outcomes from amblyopia treatment.

Amblyopia will not go away on its own, and untreated lazy eye can lead to permanent visual problems and poor depth perception. If later in life your child's stronger eye develops disease or is injured, he or she will depend on the poor vision of the amblyopic eye, so it is best to treat amblyopia early on.

For more information about Amblyopia, please call Dr. Lothes at (614) 841-9300 to set up and examination and consultation.