

# Children's Vision Care

## The importance of children's vision care

- **How can poor eyesight affect my child?**

Children learn mostly with their eyes. Clear comfortable vision is necessary for a child to learn successfully. Reading, writing, board work, computers – they all are hard work if you cannot see clearly. Many everyday tasks at school require seeing quickly and using visual information.

- **My child seems to see well...**

The board may still look clear and sharp even when a child is having problems with close work. A child who doesn't see the board clearly may not even think to complain because it may have always looked that way. Sometimes it is the amount of effort and work required to see clearly that causes the problems.

- **Are learning difficulties and poor vision related?**

Many children who have learning difficulties, especially with reading, have focusing problems. They may also have poor eye coordination. These can cause stress or fatigue when doing close work. Children with vision-related learning difficulties often see well in the distance. Near vision problems may not be detected, even by the screening programs in schools.

- **What is involved in close work?**

When reading, many processes need to work together. The eyes need to focus equally on the page and work together to prevent double vision. The eyes then need to be able to move quickly and accurately from word-to-word and line-to-line. The brain needs to interpret the images it receives to make sense of what it sees.

- **What about eye coordination skills?**

Clear eyesight helps in learning, but for close work, and particularly reading, other visual skills are needed. Children must have a variety of scanning, focusing, and eye coordination skills for learning. If these skills have not developed well, learning is stressful and difficult.

- **What can parents and caregivers do?**

If a child is having difficulty at school, parents, caregivers and teachers should consider undetected visual problems as a possible cause. A full and thorough eye examination by an NZAO optometrist is the most effective way of detecting and eliminating the possibility of visual problems.

### What does an Optometrist examine?

- Distance vision (*visual acuity*) - Your child should be able to see well in the distance with both eyes.
- Near vision - The ability to see close objects comfortably and clearly is important for both learning and play.
- Changing focus (*accommodation*) - Changing focus from distance to near and back again is a big part of classroom learning. Your child needs to be able to do this comfortably and quickly.
- Aiming the eyes (*fixation*) - Double vision or confused images can occur if the two eyes do not aim together. This can seriously affect learning and play.
- Eye movement and coordination skills (*saccades and tracking*) - In order to see well the eyes need to move together in a smooth and precise fashion. This is very important when following a moving object. The eyes also need to be able to jump immediately from one object to another, such as word-to-word or line-to-line in reading.
- Peripheral vision - Peripheral vision is important so your child is aware of what is happening around them. This is important in classroom situations, in sport and in play.
- Colour Vision - Good colour vision is not a vital function, but is important in some career choices. Boys are affected more often than girls.
- Eye Health - A thorough external and internal examination of your child's eyes is necessary to identify

any possible underlying eye health problems.

- Eye Drops - The optometrist may decide it is necessary to put drops in your child's eyes. These drops relax the focusing system and can allow a more reliable testing of any focusing problems. The drops also make the pupils larger than normal. The effect lasts only 3-4 hours.

- **Regular Eye Exams!!!**

The NZ Association of Optometrists recommends a regular eye examination every 2 – 3 years for healthy adults. After age 65 more frequent exams are necessary to ensure early diagnosis and treatment of sight threatening conditions such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration (ARMD).

Members of NZAO can provide an assessment for any child's eye health and visual performance in a range of conditions. They also have access to information and techniques specific to children's vision needs. Some optometrists have special skill and knowledge in the area of children's vision and visual training. A referral for specialist assessment can always be made if it is needed.

### **Tick the box if these symptoms relate to your child!**

- Headaches
- Complains of not seeing clearly
- Rubs eyes
- Burning or itchy eyes
- Shuts one eye when reading
- Tilts the head at an angle to the book while reading
- Holds a book very close
- Moves the head sideways when reading
- Omits small words when reading
- Poor concentration
- Copies incorrectly from the blackboard
- Loses place when copying from other written material
- Misaligns digits in columns of numbers
- Avoids close work
- Becomes tired after close work
- Blinks excessively when doing near vision work, but not otherwise
- Reverses letters or numbers
- Writes up or down hill, with irregular letter or word spacing
- A history of eye problems in the family, especially in brothers or sisters.

If you ticked more than one box, please have your child's eyes examined by an NZAO optometrist.

If in doubt – check it out! Eliminate vision as a problem