

# Healthy Eyes, Clear Vision

Here are some good eye care habits that you can share with your child.



## What Causes Short-Sightedness?

About half the children in Singapore have myopia — also known as short-sightedness — by the time they are 12 years old. If you have myopia, things that are close to you can be seen clearly, but objects that are further away will look blur.

Myopia can lead to potentially blinding problems like amblyopia (lazy eye) and glaucoma (where there is increased fluid pressure in the eyeball).

## Who Is Likely To Develop Myopia?

Your child is more likely to develop myopia if you and/or your spouse suffer from myopia. Unnecessary near work and lack of outdoor play also contribute to myopia.

- Near work are visual activities that are done at close distances, including:
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Using a computer
  - Drawing and painting
  - Playing with games on handheld devices, such as mobile phones
  - Doing craft work using small objects

## Can Myopia Be Cured?

Currently, there is no cure for myopia. Spectacles or contact lenses are needed to correct it in order to see distant objects clearly.

Laser surgery such as LASIK does not cure myopia. The procedure shapes the cornea to act like a focusing lens. It does not treat the elongated myopic eyeball. Also, LASIK is rarely performed in children as their eyes are still developing.

**Related: Different Spectacle Lenses**

## What Complications Could Arise From Myopia?

High degrees of myopia could lead to potentially blinding complications such as:

### 1. Amblyopia or “Lazy Eye”

There is reduced vision in an eye that did not develop normally during early childhood. Unless treated, vision in the weaker eye will be permanently blurred.

### 2. Cataract

The lens in the eye becomes cloudy, causing blurred vision.

### 3. Glaucoma

There is increased fluid pressure within the eyeball. Left untreated, this can cause blindness.

### 4. Retinal Detachment

This is a serious condition when the retina has separated from the eyeball. If left untreated, it can lead to blindness.

### 5. Macular Degeneration

The central part of the retina that gives the clearest vision degenerates.

## Good Eye Care Habits

### Healthy Habits

#### Spend At Least 2 hours a Day Outdoors

Spending time outdoors has shown to have a protective effect against myopia and myopia progression. It is recommended that your child should spend at least 2 hours a day outdoors where there is sunlight exposure.

Exactly how outdoor time combats myopia is not confirmed, however there are theories that increased light exposure outdoors, depth of field, and the release of dopamine (one of the brain's chemical messengers) could affect the way eyes develop as your child ages.

Let your child engage in outdoor fun every day. You can play a sport together, have a picnic, go for walks in the park — or just have fun in the playground. An active lifestyle also has other benefits. It offers your child:

- A fun way to stay healthy.
- Relaxation.
- Opportunities to make new friends.
- Self-awareness through play.
- Life skills such as communication and sociability.

### Spend Less Time On Continuous Near Work

Reduce the time that your children are allowed to spend playing games on hand-held electronic devices, handphone games and other computer-related activities such as blogging and internet chats.

When indoors, monitor the time your child spends on continuous reading, writing and other near work. And make sure the little one practises good eye care habits such as doing near work activities under proper lighting, and maintaining a distance from a book or screen. Remind and encourage your child to take frequent breaks and rest his eyes after a period of near work activities. They could look out of the window into the distance or at nearby greenery, or go outdoors for a while.

A good rule of thumb to remember is that looking at distant objects relaxes our eyes while looking at near objects taxes them!

### **When Reading**

Ensure that there is adequate lighting. Choose books with larger print. Sit upright and hold the book a distance away.

### **At the Computer, Playing Video Games or Watching TV**

Ensure that the environment is well-lit. Reduce screen glare. Encourage your child to take frequent breaks. Sit upright with the centre of the screen at eye level. Sit a distance away from the TV that is appropriate to its size; the bigger the TV, the further away your child should sit.

- Even if your child has been screened for myopia in school, it's a good idea to take them for a check-up if they are squinting, having headaches or blurred vision.

### **Medical Treatment To Prevent Myopia Progression**

Slowing down myopia can reduce the risk of developing high myopia and potentially blinding complications.

- Low-concentration Atropine eye drops can be used to slow down myopia progression in children. Please consult an eye specialist for more details.
- Various myopia control lenses can be used to slow down myopia progression in children. Please consult a community eye care optometrist for more details.

### **Parent-Child Activities: Get Active!**

You can help to delay your child's onset and progression of myopia. Here are some tips:

- Encourage your child to spend at least 2 hours outdoors every day.
- Do not let your child engage in near work for long, continuous stretches.
- Encourage your child to take frequent breaks when doing near work.

Engage in these fun activities with your child to help exercise his eyes.

### Let's Play Ball

Play ball games to improve eye-hand coordination. Use balloons or light beach balls to play toss-and-catch with younger children. Teach older kids how to play racquet games like badminton and set up games with friends and neighbours. Let your child have fun practising how to hit with a kid-sized racquet and a shuttlecock.

### A Snappy Reminder

Go outdoors and play to help your child keep myopia at bay. Take your child outside to a park or playground. Encourage your child to take photos of interesting things he sees around him. To enable the activity to be more interesting, you can set a theme for your child. For example, the theme can be "pictures of green and clean things". Alternatively, if your child is interested in drawing, he can choose to draw interesting objects. Back home, you can print the photos and collate them in an album or display them on a wall or pin them to a noticeboard.

### "I spy"

Play the "I Spy" game with your child when you are out, walking in a park, or taking a bus or car ride. This will encourage him to look at things in the distance and also develop his observation skills.

### References:

Marcus Ang & Tien Y. Wong. Updates on Myopia, A Clinical Perspective. *Springer Open*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8491-2>

Visit Parent Hub, for more useful tips and guides to give your child a healthy start.

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