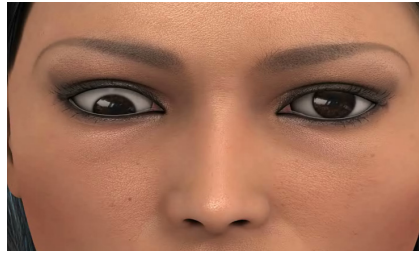


SQUINT (STRABISMUS)

Q What is a squint?

A Squint (strabismus) is the term used to describe the condition where one of the eyes turns inwards, outwards, upwards or downwards while the other is looking straight ahead.



The cause, severity, and direction of a squint varies from person to person. It is usually spotted in childhood, sometimes within weeks of a baby being born, and affects 5-8% of children.

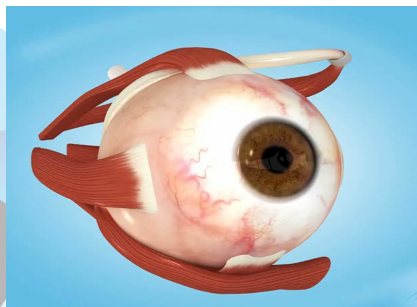
Q How does a squint affect vision?

A Squints are common and in the majority of cases do not cause any symptoms. However, if a child has a squint during the first few years of life, the vision in the affected eye will not develop properly and the eye will become "lazy" (amblyopic).

Squints which appear later in life usually cause double vision.

Q What causes a squint?

A Each eye is surrounded by six muscles which allow us to move the eyes and point both eyes at the object we are looking at.



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Controlling these muscles is a delicate balancing act and occasionally the balance is upset and the eyes become misaligned. This can be caused by the incorrect placement of a muscle, a weakness of one or more of the muscles or a problem with the nerves supplying the muscles.

Some children are born with squints while others develop squints during early childhood. Squints can also occur as a result of a childhood illness such as measles or chickenpox or sometimes as a result of being very long-sighted.

Squints which appear later in life can be a sign of a more serious underlying problem and should be investigated as a matter of urgency.



Q What can be done to help?

A The treatment of squint depends on the age of onset and the underlying cause. In some cases the eyes can be re-aligned by carrying out eye exercises to strengthen the eye muscles. In other cases, spectacles may be required to straighten the eyes.

If none of these treatments help, then surgery may be required. Surgery for a squint usually involves moving the muscles attached to the outside of the eye to a new position. It may sometimes be necessary to operate on both eyes in order to 'balance' them effectively, even if the squint is only in one eye.

If a child has a squint during the first few years of life, the vision in the affected eye will not develop properly and the eye will become "lazy" (amblyopic). This can sometimes be treated by simply realigning the eyes but in most cases the good eye will need to be covered by a patch for a while to get the lazy eye to do some work. This treatment is only effective in children under the age of about 7 years and therefore, it is strongly recommended that all children have an eye examination by the age of 4 years.

