Amblyopia

(am-blee-oh-pee-uh)

NYC Health

What is amblyopia?

Amblyopia is a vision condition that occurs when one of the eyes does not develop normally. It presents during early childhood and can be treated successfully at a young age using eyeglasses, an eye patch or eye drops. If left untreated, amblyopia can lead to permanently reduced vision or vision loss in one or both eyes.

Four out of every 100 adults have permanently reduced vision due to untreated amblyopia.
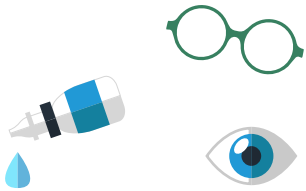
What causes amblyopia?

1 **Unequal focus**

When one eye sees better than the other, the brain uses the better eye and shuts the other down.

2 **Misaligned eyes (strabismus)**

When a child's eyes do not line up properly, the brain shuts down one eye to avoid double vision.

3 **Cataracts and other physical problems**

Cataracts (cloudy lens inside the eye) or a droopy eyelid are less common than other causes.

How can you tell if your child has amblyopia?

The best way to detect amblyopia is at annual visits to the pediatrician and when vision tests are given in school. Waiting until you notice a crossed eye or droopy eyelid is often too late.

Action Steps

- **Addressing the cause:** For focus or alignment problems, glasses are usually prescribed. Cataracts and physical abnormalities may need surgery.
- **Strengthening the eye:** The stronger eye may be patched or medicated to make the amblyopic eye work harder.

Tip: Patching is generally required for about two hours per day. Be kind but firm while encouraging your child to wear a patch.

Timeline

- **When to intervene:** The sooner, the better! By 8 or 9 years old, visual development is nearly complete, and it may be too late to treat successfully.
- **Treatment time:** Treatment may range from a few weeks to one year. After treatment, checkups may be required until 9 to 10 years old.

Schedule regular eye exams for your child. Earlier diagnosis means more successful treatment. Regular checkups should start between 6 and 12 months old — no child is too young for a full eye exam if something seems abnormal. School-age children should receive annual exams, and most insurances, including Medicaid, cover the cost of a full vision exam and at least one pair of glasses.

For more information, call the NYC Health Department Vision Program at 855-771-3937 or visit **nyc.gov/health/vision**.