

Eye Protection for Kids - Wpg Free Press email interview Oct 8, 2014

(1) What is your role at Armstrong and Small? I'm guessing you are a co-owner and optometrist.

-Yes, co-owner with my wife Dr. Gina Small where we practice with our full time associate Dr. Shannon Smith.

(2) What is your experience with young people and eye health (ex: lots of young patients)?

-Our practice sees roughly a third of our patients under the age of 18, another third between the ages of 19-64 and the final third is comprised of those over 65. Since I took over my dad and grandfather's practice, I tend to see more of the over 65 year olds than Gina or Shannon, but having practiced for over 14 years I've been involved with practices that see more than 50% kids.

(3) What steps should parents/young people be taking to ensure eye protection for kids at school and at play/in sports?

-Protective eyewear can help prevent many of the sports-related eye injuries that occur in children each year.

-Vision plays a critical role in sports and should not be jeopardized to eye injuries

-I sit on the Manitoba board at the CNIB and their site shows that there were over 3500 eye related injuries in Canada over the 30 years from 1972-2002. Over 90% of these could have been prevented had that person had proper eye protection. Even more alarming is that over 10% of these injuries resulted in complete loss of vision in the injured eye.

-I try to remind parents that children who participate in sports under the age of 12 are generally at higher risk for an eye injury as their visual perception is still developing and they tend to have a more difficult time judging the speed and distance of a puck or

ball

-each sport has its own risks to eye injury and the CNIB broke these down into the following categories:

High Risk: shooting sports that involve an air rifle or BB gun, baseball, basketball, boxing, cricket, fencing, hockey, lacrosse, full-contact martial arts, paintball, racquetball, softball, squash, badminton

Moderate Risk: fishing, football, golf, soccer, tennis, volleyball

Low Risk: bicycling, diving, non-contact martial arts, skiing (snow and water), swimming, wrestling, track & field, gymnastics

- the biggest 3 culprits based on the statistics are hockey, racquet sports and baseball/softball
- my sister's numerous goalie masks over the years are an ode to eye protection with many bent cages from a fast moving puck (often redirected at her head)
- the hockey injuries that I typically see in older kids happen at the community club when they don't have a helmet on with a cage or mask. I also see this when boys hit a certain level and they no longer require the cage and switch to a visor. There is no doubt that a visor is better than nothing, but studies have shown time and time again that peripheral vision is not affected by full face protection. I play a lot of pick up hockey (shinny) at community clubs around the city and often see signage for mandatory helmets with face/eye protection for kids under the age of 14. I'm a huge proponent of this and only recently started to wear a helmet and full-face protection myself. I felt that I should be an ambassador based on what I do. The kids don't give me a second look, but other parents on the ice often do
- the machismo that goes along with this will take a long time to break. Old habits die hard. I've heard every excuse in the book from Adult League Hockey Players. Interesting that often the ones who do wear full-face protection do so due to a dental injury.

- interesting to see the mandatory full face protection for women's hockey at the Olympic level. Again, there is a long standing male thought pattern that eye protection in hockey will affect they way a hockey player performs. Since I don't think any of the Adult League players will be making it to the NHL any time soon :), there isn't much of an excuse for full face protection other than getting used to it.
- The type of protective eye wear will vary from sport to sport, but making sure that the protective eye wear fits well and that the child is comfortable in that piece of equipment is crucial
- It is important for parents to remember that if their child wears regular glasses they are not a substitute for eye protection (see options below)
- I make sure that I strongly advise all parents of a child who has amblyopia (one eye that is weaker) that eye protection is mandatory in sports to protect the other good eye

(4) What are the biggest misconceptions about eye protection/health among young people? Why do you think some people take their eye health/sight for granted?

- I think it's really important in this article to emphasize the fact that in Manitoba kids eye exams are covered by the province annually. So many parents base their children's eye care on how well their child sees when there is so much more to eye care than 20/20 vision. Many parents are surprised to learn that their kids should be having annual eye exams, but when I ask them how often their children see the dentist it is often every 6 months. Even without any complaints from the child it is crucial for them to see a Doctor of Optometry annually to rule out any eye health issues that don't affect vision and also to evaluate the child's binocular vision (BV) status. BV refers to how do the two eyes work together. Is one eye much weaker with a much

different prescription than the other? Do all the extra-ocular muscles work in a coordinated fashion? Is the child able to converge their eyes and track properly when reading? All of these things can go hidden for a long time without having an eye exam. Nearly 80% of learning is visual so I've seen many instances where kids have fallen behind in school and it's not until they are 10 or 11 before someone suggests that they have an eye exam and sure enough there is a problem that could have been eliminated at a much earlier age

- kids and adults alike often take their eyes for granted until something happens (like a sports related injury) or even eye disease in older adults. Routine eye exams with a Doctor of Optometry have been shown to catch oculo-visual problems earlier in children and can often be prevented with something as simple as a pair of glasses. I can't count how many times a parent is completely blown away when they discover their son or daughter doesn't see properly out of one eye
- I personally recommend to parents that their kids start having eye exams annually at the age of three and then every two years starting at the age of 19. At age 65 I start seeing patients annually again. Many optometrists do see kids at an earlier age than age 3 and the Canadian Optometric Association recommends a preliminary eye exam at 6 months. Personally I typically see kids under 3 when the parents have a particular concern. Currently the wait time on seeing the pediatric ophthalmologist in Manitoba can be over 12 months. This will no doubt improve soon as we have a new specialist starting in Manitoba that will decrease this wait time. I often recommend parents take their child to an optometrist during this wait period as we can get some preliminary results for the pediatric ophthalmologist before they see the child. I'm also seeing more and more pediatricians and family physicians referring to optometrists to rule out their oculo-visual concerns before referring directly to an ophthalmologist who often have their practices filled with surgical patients. This form of co-

management for patients of all ages seems to be working well in our practice.

(5) What advances/trends are we seeing in protective eye wear for active kids/young adults?

- Just like regular eyewear, the options for kids/young-adults eye protection gets cooler and cooler all the time. I call this the "Oakley phenomenon" and if it helps kids of any age to wear eye protection more often then I am all for it.
- young-adults will often see the professional athletes they admire wearing a certain brand of sunglasses while they do their sport and they want to emulate them
- many of the sports type goggles are now much better fitting and I highly recommend these for all racquet sports. Badminton in particular tends to lend itself to eye injuries. There is no excuse for anyone of any age not to wear a protective eye wear in these situations. Goggles should fit snugly and they can be made with a glasses prescription. Polycarbonate lenses are impact-resistant (10 times stronger than typical plastics), thin and lightweight, and strongly encouraged for children. The elastic band keeps them in place and prevents them from sliding off your child's head.
- parents should be asking their optometrist for recommendations and what options they have for eye protection for their child

(6) What advice would you give parents who are procrastinating on eye exams for their kids?

- Do it now! Part of this is often just a lack of education on the

importance that it plays in the child's development

- Manitoba Doctors of Optometry are doing are best to promote the fact that eye exams are covered by Manitoba Health annually for children as best we can with articles such as this as well as radio ads and billboards.
- as a member of our PR committee, I would like us to get this information into the hands of all new moms when their first child is born in Manitoba