



## UPTOWN EYECARE & OPTICAL

### CHILDREN VISION AND FREQUENCY OF EYE EXAMINATIONS

I have always admired pediatricians asking if my kids had their teeth checked preventatively twice a year – what a great reminder I thought. However, unless I brought it up, no one recommended annual eye exams. I was happy to see that my kids had a quick vision screening during their wellness exam at age 5, however, both passed the screening, yet both have significant eye alignment problems! As an optometrist, I know that vision screening is not a replacement for an actual eye exam, but most parents do not know that. A child's vision and eye health is as important as their dental health, and let me tell you why:

#### **BABIES:**

Clinical experience and research have shown that at just 6 months of age, the average child has reached a number of critical developmental milestones, making this an appropriate age for the first eye and vision assessment. Many visual abilities are fully functioning by the age of 6 months. Interference with development during this critical phase many lead to serious lifelong effects on vision. Successful treatment can be obtained more quickly with early intervention. Problems that need correction at this age group are congenital abnormalities such as congenital cataract, strabismus, high prescriptions or unequal prescriptions between the eyes.

One in every 10 children is at risk from undiagnosed eye and vision problems, yet only 13% of mothers with children younger than 2 years of age said they had taken their babies to see an eye care professional for regular check-ups. According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), strabismus will develop in approximately 4% and amblyopia will develop in 3% of children - this equates to as many as 100,000 infants born each year who are at risk for serious eye and vision problems. *Therefore, **the first eye exam should be performed between the ages of 6-12 months.*** Infant SEE is a great way to examine your baby's eyes, especially if you do not have them under your vision insurance. Many local practices participate in Infant SEE, and all optometric physicians at Uptown EyeCare, are part of this great program. I strongly believe that every pediatrician should be recommending an eye exam to a parent of a one year old!

#### **TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS:**

Although teenagers and adults tend to have more vision problems, younger kids may not see as well as they should and as their parents / teachers think they are seeing. According to research, just 1 out of every 7 preschoolers receives an eye exam, and fewer than 1 out of every 4 preschoolers receives some type of vision screening. Many states in the US now mandate that all kids entering kindergarten require an eye exam and not just a vision screening - sadly, Oregon is not one of them.

We know that about 80% of what a child learns is through their eyes, and the inability to see clearly can affect a child's physical, mental and social development, which in turn can affect academic and athletic performance later on. Kids who squint, sit very close to a screen, or who avoid reading or near activities, or perhaps are slow learners, may have a vision problem. Additional signs of possible vision issues include coordination problems in sports, headaches, frequent eye rubbing or blinking, abnormal head posture, developmental delays, failure to maintain eye contact, or poor eye tracking skills. For all these reasons stated and many more, early detection of vision problems is crucial, as undiagnosed and untreated vision problems (such as strabismus (=crossed eye(s)) or amblyopia (= lazy eye)) can impair child's development, affect learning and possibly lead to permanent vision loss. The AOA recommends **the next eye exam to be performed is around the age of 3 (between the ages of 2-5).** The sooner strabismus and amblyopia are treated, the better the eyes are able to work as a team, providing binocular vision, and vision and learning will become more comfortable.

#### **SCHOOL – AGE KIDS:**

Further, the **AOA recommends having eyes checked again before first grade and every one to two years thereafter**, depending on risk factors. Children considered at risk for the development of eye and vision problems may need additional testing or more frequent re-evaluations. Optometrists and ophthalmologists can discuss potential risk factors only after a full vision and eye health exam. A school vision screening, while helpful, is not a substitute for a comprehensive eye examination.

Just like with vision insurance, most parents add their children to their medical insurance, and under the new Affordable Care Act (ACA) rule, most medical insurances are mandated to have annual dental and vision coverage for children under the age of 18. This means that kids who have pediatric vision coverage under medical insurance only can still be seen for their annual eyecare, just like kids with vision insurance! Sadly, lot of parents are unaware of these benefits. Many parents also think that vision exams are unnecessary if their kids are not complaining of any vision problems. I can tell you that both of my twin girls never complained of any vision issues, and like other small children, when asked, didn't really know how clear their vision should really be. It even took me, a skilled optometrist, some time to diagnose them properly and start their effective treatment (that we are still undergoing as of now).

We need to think of our future generation of kids, whose lives are going to be faster and more computer-driven than ours and get their eyes checked from infancy. I argue that examining their eyes is as important, if not more important, than getting their teeth checked. Baby teeth always fall out, and one can always get a tooth implant if our permanent teeth fail us, but unfortunately we can't do that with eyes. I hope you found this article helpful and convincing, and I also hope that you will **make scheduling your kid's eye exams your top priority!**