



AUGUST IS

Children's Eye Health and Safety Awareness Month

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As a mother and optometrist, I am always on the look out for signs that could indicate a possible vision problem in my child and in my young patients.

I know that good eyesight is crucial in making sure a child develops to their full potential both at school and socially. The importance of healthy eyesight can not be stressed enough which is why there is no better opportunity to educate parents and caregivers during August as children get ready to start school.

Research shows that around 20% of school-aged children have an undiagnosed vision problem. The eye is still developing throughout early childhood so if problems are treated early, it can make a lasting difference. This is why looking after children's eyesight is especially important. Without good vision, a child's ability to learn about the world becomes more difficult.

How do I know if my child has a vision problem?

Some eye conditions do not display any signs or symptoms, so the only way to know for sure is to take your child for an eye test. Signs which may show there is a problem include:

- * An eye appearing to drift inwards or outwards
- * Difficulty concentrating
- * Behavioural problems
- * Headaches
- * Sitting too close to the television
- * Frequent eye rubbing



Most parents don't schedule a regular eye exam for their child unless there's an obvious problem. Typically, this doesn't show up until a school vision screening when a child is old enough to use an eye chart. However, while these school vision screenings are important, important problems may be missed that can affect your child's eyesight and learning.

The American Optometric Association estimates that vision screenings miss up to 75% of children with vision problems and give less than 4% of the information provided by a comprehensive eye exam. Because of the importance of vision in learning, some schools even require a comprehensive eye exam for all children entering the school for the first time.

What else can I do to look after my child's eyes?

- * Get them outdoors – regular play and exercise can help with eye health. Studies show two hours of outdoor activity a day is ideal for healthy eyes.
- * Make sure they eat healthily and drink enough fluids.
- * Protect their eyes from the sun – never let them look directly into the sun and make sure they always wear good-quality sunglasses.
- * Monitor screen time. Children's screen time has understandably increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, but a good balance between the digital and real world is encouraged. The 20/20/20 rule is also recommended. Look away from the screen every 20 minutes, focus on an object at least 20 feet away, for at least 20 seconds. In addition, children should walk away from the screen for at least 10 minutes every hour.



The key for parents is, number one, trust your gut, and, number two, don't wait. If something doesn't seem right with your child's vision, chances are, you're right. Talk to your pediatrician or family doctor about your concerns or call your optometrist to book an appointment.

During the flurry of back-to-school preparedness, don't take your child's eye care for granted. Routine eye exams are as important as seeing your family doctor or dentist.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tegwen Kimber is an optometrist at Ferreira Optical where she has been practicing since 2013. She graduated from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, with a bachelors degree in Optometry in 2008. After graduating, she worked in Johannesburg for 3 years before relocating to Trinidad and Tobago.

Tegwen's professional desire is to not only provide a comprehensive eye examination, but also to connect with her patients on an emotional level to make sure that each one feels valued and reassured about their eye health.

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