

Amblyopia

Amblyopia is often referred to as 'lazy eye.' It can be caused by a visual obstruction such as cataracts, a refractive error that occurs when the curve of the eye is incorrect, or by strabismus which is an abnormal alignment of the eyes. The effects of amblyopia are: abnormal vision (less than 20/20), eye misalignment, uncoordinated eye movement, loss of depth perception, and squinting or closing one eye while focusing.

Newborn babies cannot focus properly on an object at birth. Babies learn to focus both eyes in the same way that they learn to control their motor skills. If they are incapable of focusing both eyes, they will experience double vision or other visual disturbances. Because this is a difficult way to view the world around them, they will learn to rely on only one eye for vision.

Treatment of this condition is determined after a thorough exam by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor who is an M.D.). Tests are often used to determine how misaligned the eyes are and how much depth perception is affected.

If amblyopia is detected in an infant, certain testing may not be possible. The doctor may choose to attempt to strengthen the misaligned eye by placing a patch over the stronger eye so that the baby is forced to use the weaker eye. If this doesn't correct the problem as the child grows up, then glasses will probably be prescribed to help correct and balance the eyes.

It is extremely important to the correction of amblyopia that treatment begins as early as possible. A child's nervous system continues to develop during infancy, and amblyopia can only be corrected during this sensitive period. Doing nothing and waiting will only cause permanent, irreversible damage.