

What is myopia?

Myopia means short-sightedness. If your child is myopic (short-sighted), this is often because their eye is slightly longer than usual (from the front to the back). To have clear vision, light must focus directly on the retina. The retina is light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. If your child has myopia, light focuses in front of the retina, so their distance vision is blurry.

The visual symptoms can be corrected using standard glasses or contact lenses, but they do not slow down the rate at which myopia progresses. Some treatments with specially designed glasses or contact lenses (or both) may help slow down the progression of myopia. This is known as myopia management. However, they do not prevent progression and more research is needed to understand the long-term benefits and risks.

Who is affected by myopia?

Around a third of people in the UK are myopic. The condition usually starts in childhood (between 6 and 13 years of age) and tends to get worse until the eye has stopped growing. Myopia can also develop in younger children and adults. People are more likely to become myopic if their parents are myopic.

What are the symptoms of myopia?

If your child is myopic, they will have problems seeing things in the distance clearly without glasses or contact lenses. But they will often be able to see things that are close to them. There are varying degrees of myopia.

Can myopia be prevented?

Myopia management treatments slow myopia progression but doesn't prevent myopia. Research shows that spending more time outdoors may help prevent or delay myopia from developing in children at risk of developing myopia. This may also benefit children with existing myopia by slowing progression, but the evidence for this is not strong.

Long periods of near work (such as reading and screen use) may contribute to myopia development and progression. Researchers do not fully understand why this happens. Spending more time on near work might mean your child will spend less time outdoors.

How is myopia treated?

The blurred vision in myopia is usually easy to correct with standard glasses or contact lenses (or both). Some adults with myopia may have laser surgery to correct the blurred vision. There are some treatments that may also slow down myopia during childhood. This is called myopia management.

How myopic may my child become?

The exact causes of myopia are not fully understood. This means it is difficult to predict accurately how myopic a child may become in the future. Researchers know that children may be more likely to become myopic if:

- ↘ One or both their parents have myopia.
- ↘ They are from an East Asian background.
- ↘ They spend time doing prolonged near vision activities.
- ↘ They don't spend much time outdoors.

If a child becomes myopic before nine years old, this may mean they are more likely to develop a high level of myopia. If a person has a high level of myopia, they will be at a slightly greater risk of serious eye conditions later in life compared to people with normal vision. These conditions include retinal detachments, glaucoma and myopic retinal degeneration. These conditions can potentially lead to sight loss. But most cases can be treated and the risk of developing these conditions among the general population is small.

Can I reduce how myopic my child will become?

Trying to slow down how quickly myopia gets worse is called myopia management. Some treatments have been developed for this, including specially designed contact lenses, or glasses.

Summary

If your child is myopic, they will have problems seeing things in the distance clearly without glasses or contact lenses. If a person has a high level of myopia, they will be at a slightly greater risk of serious eye conditions later in life compared to people with normal vision.

Trying to slow down how quickly myopia gets worse is called myopia management. Some treatments have been developed for this, including specially designed contact lenses, or glasses.

Research shows that spending more time outdoors may help prevent or delay myopia from developing in children at risk of developing myopia.

For more information, please talk to your local optometrist

If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes, please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are eye health specialists. An eye examination is a vital health check and should be part of everyone's regular health care.

For clear and helpful information on vision and eye health issues and keeping your eyes healthy, visit:

<https://www.nhs.wales/sa/eye-care-wales/professionals/wgos/member-of-the-public/patient-resources/>

This information is produced collaboratively between NHS Wales and The College of Optometrists.



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