

Amblyopia (Lazy Eye)

WHAT IS AMBLYOPIA?

Amblyopia is the loss or lack of development of vision in one eye that is unrelated to any eye health problem. It is not correctable with lenses alone and there is no apparent cause for the poor vision. The brain, for some reason, does not acknowledge the images seen by the amblyopic eye.

WHO IS LIKELY TO DEVELOP AMBLYOPIA?

Amblyopia is generally the result of poor early visual development, and as such, usually occurs before the age of five or six. It is estimated that two to four percent of children under the age of six have amblyopia. The chance of amblyopia developing during adulthood is very small.

WHAT CAUSES AMBLYOPIA?

The exact cause is unclear. Amblyopia usually results from a failure to use both eyes together. If there is a large enough difference in the degree of nearsightedness or farsightedness between the two eyes, or if the eyes are crossed (strabismic), the brain learns to ignore one image in favor of the other.

HOW DOES AMBLYOPIA AFFECT VISION?

Normally the images sent by each eye to the brain are identical. When they differ, double vision occurs. Rather than go through life with double vision, the brain soon learns to ignore the image sent by one eye and "sees" only with the good eye. The eye that is ignored becomes weaker from disuse.

IS THE AMBLYOPIC EYE BLIND?

The amblyopic eye is never blind in the sense of being entirely without sight. Amblyopia affects only the central vision of the affected eye. Peripheral awareness will remain.

WHAT ARE SIGNS/SYMPTOMS OF AMBLYOPIA?

Amblyopia is usually accompanied by crossed-eyes or a large difference in the refractive error between the two eyes. A child may also exhibit noticeable favoring of one eye and may have a tendency to bump into objects on one particular side.

HOW IS AMBLYOPIA DIAGNOSED?

A comprehensive eye examination by your doctor of optometry can determine the presence of amblyopia. The earlier it is diagnosed, the greater the chance for a complete recovery. That is why it is important to have your child's vision examined before the age of three and again when entering school. Since amblyopia occurs only in one eye, the good eye takes over and the individual is generally unaware of the condition.

HOW IS AMBLYOPIA TREATED?

Corrective lenses, prisms, contact lenses and/or vision therapy are often used to treat amblyopia. In less developed cases, patching the good eye often stimulates and strengthens the amblyopic eye. In more advanced situations, other vision therapy techniques are used.

DOES AMBLYOPIA GET WORSE?

The vision of the eye itself does not get worse, but the brain simply pays less and less attention to the images sent by the amblyopic eye. Eventually, the condition stabilizes and the eye becomes virtually unused. Since it is quite difficult to correct amblyopia at this point, early detection and treatment are extremely important.

IS AMBLYOPIA PREVENTABLE?

Early detection and treatment of crossed-eyes and severe refractive errors can help reduce the chances of one eye becoming amblyopic.

HOW GREAT A HANDICAP IS AMBLYOPIA?

Amblyopia is a handicap because it can limit the types of work and leisure activities you can do. In addition, should your good eye become injured or develop vision problems, you may have difficulty maintaining your normal activities.