

Understanding your child's squint

This leaflet explains about squints, the causes and the consequences. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact 020 7188 4299 and leave a message on our answer phone.

What is a squint?

A squint is a condition where the eyes are misaligned or crossed. One eye can turn in (convergent), out (divergent), up, or down. Squints can occur in approximately three out of 100 (3%) children.

What causes a squint?

There are several types of squint and the causes are not always known. Your child has a greater risk of developing a squint if;

1. There is a family history of squint or need to wear glasses
2. Your child is long sighted (hypermetropia)
3. Your child was born prematurely
4. Your child has complex needs.

When does a squint develop?

A squint can be present at birth or develop soon after. A squint can also develop any time throughout life but is often seen at 2½-3 years when the child starts to focus. Sometimes the shape of a baby's face may give the appearance of a squint although there is no real misalignment or crossed eyes. This is called a Pseudosquint which usually fades or disappears as the child gets older.

A baby will NOT grow out of a true squint. An Orthoptist (a health professional trained in visual development and eye movement) must always see children with a suspected squint.

How does a squint affect my child?

A squint can affect your child in different ways

Reduced vision

The vision in a squinting eye will get worse if left untreated; this is because your child's eyes are not fully developed until the age of 7-8 years. Any interruption in this development, (i.e. a squint or the need for glasses) can lead to a lack of normal development.

Loss of ability to use both eyes together

A child with a squint may not be able to use both eyes together and may not as somebody with eyes that work together would do.

Appearance

Large squints make normal eye contact difficult which is important for communicating well with others.

What will happen when my child sees the Orthoptist?

The Orthoptist will measure your child's vision, examine for a squint and check for eye movement disorders. They may need to put drops in to enable an examination of the back of the eye. Orthoptists diagnose and plan treatment for your child's eye condition together with the Ophthalmologist (doctor trained in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of diseases of the eye and visual system) and the Optometrist (healthcare professional trained to examine the health of the eye and prescribe glasses/contact lenses as needed).

What is the treatment for a squint?

The Orthoptist supervises the entire treatment, and your child is seen regularly to monitor the success of treatment. Treatment of your child's squint may involve some or all of the following;

- glasses
- patching
- exercises
- surgery.

Glasses

Some squints are completely improved by the use of glasses while others are only partially improved. It is important that your child wears their glasses so that the vision develops normally. The Optometrist or Ophthalmologist will prescribe the lenses and advise you on the types of frames and lenses suitable for your child.

Patching

If the vision in one eye is not developing normally the Orthoptist may give your child a patch to wear over their better seeing eye. Patching does not improve a squint or replace the need for glasses, a patch improves vision. Wearing a patch over the better seeing eye stimulates the vision in the weaker eye and encourages it to work harder. The amount of time your child needs to wear the patch is prescribed by the Orthoptist. Patching is most successful when it is carried out while your child is performing visual tasks such as reading, colouring, drawing, etc. Under no circumstances should a patch be worn unless directed by the Orthoptist or Ophthalmologist.

Exercises

The Orthoptist may give your child eye exercises to do regularly at home to improve the way the eyes work together.

Surgery

The Ophthalmologist advises when surgery is appropriate for your child's squint. Surgery will be recommended if there is a chance of restoring the eyes ability to work together as a pair or improving the appearance of the eyes. Not all squints require surgery but if it is needed, it can be carried out at any age.

Do I pay for glasses?

All children are entitled to a voucher to put towards the cost of glasses. Children should be able to have one pair of glasses free of charge through the NHS. This however will depend on your choice of frames. Your Optometrist will advise you on this.

How long will my child have to attend the hospital?

It is vital that you attend regular follow-up appointments. Your child's eyes may change from year to year until fully developed. Children are generally monitored until the age of 7 or 8 years.

Useful sources of information

www.squintclinic.com – the videos are very helpful

www.orthoptics.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the **Orthoptic department on 020 7188 4299**, and leave a message on our answer phone. We aim to get back to you within three working days. (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 e: members@gstt.nhs.uk w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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