



Amblyopia Treatment with Patching

What is amblyopia?

Amblyopia is when vision in one eye does not develop properly during childhood. It is sometimes called "lazy eye." Amblyopia is a common problem in babies and young children.

A child's vision develops in the first few years of life. It is important to diagnose and treat amblyopia as early as possible. Otherwise, a child with amblyopia will not develop normal, healthy vision.

How is amblyopia treated?

Amblyopia is usually corrected by making the child use their weaker eye. This is often done by putting a patch over the child's stronger eye. In some cases, eye drops can be used to blur vision in the stronger eye. Or the child may wear eyeglasses with a lens that blurs vision in that eye.



Child with patched eye

It generally takes several weeks to several months to strengthen vision in the weaker eye. Once the child has better vision in that eye, they may need to wear an eye patch part-time for a few years. This is because there is a chance that eye can weaken again. Remember to keep all appointments with the child's ophthalmologist who will carefully monitor your child's vision.

Choosing and using an eye patch

An eye patch should be comfortable, yet remain firmly in place. It should also not allow the child to peek around its edges. Most drug stores have a variety of sizes and types of eye patches. Decorated fun patches are available online. Do not use the black eye patches with elastic bands or ties (such as a pirate-type patches). These are too easy for a child to remove or peek around. To wear the patch, simply attach it to the skin around your child's eye.

If your child wears glasses, there are patches designed to attach to the lens. These may be good for children who are used to wearing a patch, but they are not as good for a child new to treatment. This is because the patch can slip or the child may learn to peek around it. If your child wears glasses and is not used to patching, it is best to attach the patch directly around the stronger eye underneath the glasses.

Keeping your child from taking off the patch

Children do not like to have their stronger eye patched or blurred. However, you need to help your child do what is best for them. Otherwise, treatment will not work.

Try distracting the child or having them do something that keeps their attention. Or reward the child with a treat for wearing the patch.

It can take a while for your child to get used to wearing a patch. Over time, this should get easier for them and you. Remember that strengthening the weaker eye is the only way to develop healthy, normal vision.

If your child still takes off the patch, as a last resort, you might cover his or her hands with gloves, mittens, or socks.

How to teach your child about the eye patch

Pre-school or school-age children might not want to wear an eye patch or use blurring eye drops. To help, parents should explain how important these treatments are to be able to see well. And reassure them that lots of children wear eye patches for the same reason.

Consider having a very young child practice putting an eye patch on a doll. Or let the child decorate his or her patch with crayons or markers.

Explain the amblyopia treatment to the child's teacher. Ask the teacher to compliment the child on being so good about wearing the patch. Children thrive on positive feedback from their teachers.

Things to consider with patching treatment:

- In very rare instances it is possible to overuse the patch or blurring eye drops. This can affect vision in the stronger eye. Be sure to keep the child's appointments with the ophthalmologist so that vision in both eyes can be closely monitored.
- The skin near your child's eye patch can get irritated. To help, try a different size or type of patch, and angle the patch differently each day.
- Your child may initially be clumsy when wearing a patch. Try to keep an eye on your child when they are climbing stairs or being active.

Summary

Amblyopia, sometimes called "lazy eye," is when vision in one eye does not develop properly during childhood. It is a common problem in babies and young children.

Amblyopia is treated by making the child use their weaker eye. This is done by putting a patch over the child's stronger eye. Sometimes eye drops or special glasses may be used to blur vision in the stronger eye. Patching may be necessary for several weeks to several months for the weaker eye to strengthen. Sometimes a child may need to continue to wear an eye patch part-time for a few years. This is because there is a chance that eye can weaken again.

Children usually do not like to wear an eye patch. Talk with them about how important good vision is. Get them involved in decorating or applying the patch. Have their teacher help at school as well.

Remember that strengthening the weaker eye is the only way to develop healthy, normal vision.

Watch an amblyopia video from the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeSmart program at aao.org/amblyopia-link.

COMPLIMENTS OF:

