

Children's eye health

Your child's sight is precious. Good vision helps them learn, play and communicate with the world around them.



Yet, there are more than a million children in the UK with undetected vision problems (source: Eye health UK)

Children's vision continues to develop until they reach the age of eight, so caring for a child's eyes in the early years can help lay the foundations for good vision that lasts a lifetime.

There are lots of simple things that you can do to help keep children's eyes healthy.

Essential Eye Checks

Having regular sight tests as advised by your optician is a great place to start.

Sight tests will ensure any problems such as childhood conditions like squint and lazy eye (amblyopia), longsightedness (hypermetropia) or short sightedness (myopia) are picked up early.

The sooner problems are identified the better the treatment outcomes.

Remember sight tests are free on the NHS for all children under 16 years or 18 in education or training. If they require vision correction (glasses or contact lenses) you'll be entitled to an optical voucher towards the cost of this too!

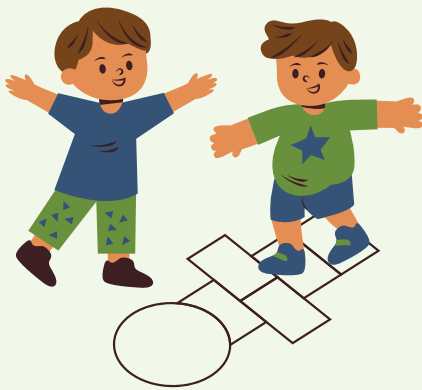
In Somerset there is access to reception aged vision screening at school.



Eat a rainbow

Eating a rainbow of colourful fruit and vegetables helps ensure young eyes get the nutrients they need to grow healthily.

Food like tomatoes, grapes and blueberries as well as fish, eggs and whole grains are packed with eye-friendly nutrients.



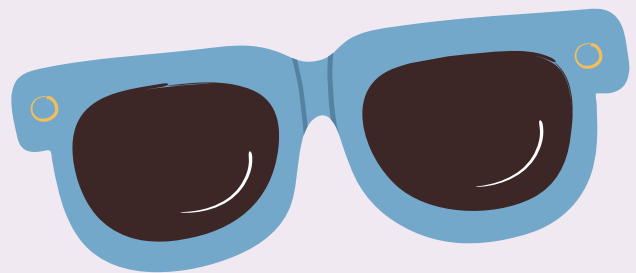
Spend time outside

There is evidence that spending two hours or more a day outdoors can reduce the risk of myopia or shortsightedness, even if there is a history of the condition, so time spent outside can benefit your children in many ways.

Try walking to school, playing outside, sports, PE lessons or going for a bike or scooter ride.

Cover up

It's really important to protect your eyes from the sun. When you're young the lens at the front of the eye is really clear so can let even more of the damaging sunlight in.



Protect children's eyes whenever the UV Index rises to three or more even on cloudy days and check that their sunglasses have a CE; UV 400 or British Standard Mark to ensure they provide the right level of UV protection.

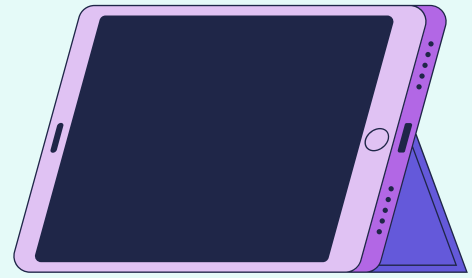


A hat with a wide brim can also help protect against damaging UV.

Visit the [Met Office](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk) website for information on UV levels.

Limit use of screens

Children should be reminded to take regular breaks whenever they do any intense close work like using a screen or reading a book. There is some evidence that excess screen time can damage vision long term.



A good rule to follow is the 20, 20, 20 rule which suggests taking a break of at least 20 seconds, every 20 minutes and to look 20 feet (6 metres) away.

Teenagers viewing smart phones should hold the screen at least 30cms away from their face to avoid eye strain.

Signs of reduced vision

It's often difficult to tell if your child is having problems with their eyes but some tell-tale signs that there could be something wrong include:

- **struggling to recognise colours and shapes**
- **not showing any interest in learning to read**
- **complaining about headaches**
- **sitting very close to the TV.**

If you recognise any of these symptoms you should arrange for your child to have a sight test.

Developed by the Orthoptic Team at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust and the Public Health Team at Somerset Council