

Caring for vision starts early

Children use their vision to guide their learning. Between the ages of two to four, preschoolers are fine-tuning their vision and learning how to direct their movement. Kicking a ball, stacking blocks, colouring-in and cutting with scissors all require accurate hand-eye co-ordination.

Most parents notice something is wrong with their child's vision around the age of four. A child may be sitting too close to the television, squinting or tilting their head. Some children may appear to be sensitive to light or may avoid tasks such as colouring and drawing.

If vision problems are diagnosed early, appropriate treatment is available.

Ophthalmologist Dr Maree Flaherty says children's eyes develop until about age 10. That provides a window for treatment.

"Children have great plasticity in their visual system before they enter school, but afterwards eyesight concerns can get much more complicated," Flaherty says.

Children should be screened and tested for eye problems before they start school, she says.

StEPS is a statewide vision screening program. It helps NSW parents better



understand if their child requires paediatric care. Testing is free.

"I receive a lot of referrals from this amazing NSW Health initiative, which is available to all four-year-olds in their preschool or day-care setting," she says.

"A child may not know that they see differently from others, so the screening is a fantastic opportunity to identify if they don't meet the expected vision line."

Flaherty's practice, the Children's Eye

Centre in Sydney's Wentworthville, has been in operation for 23 years.

As with many clinics around the world, Flaherty says she has seen an increase in myopia cases. Myopia is commonly called shortsightedness. It's a condition in which light is focused in front of the retina, resulting in blurred vision.

"Throughout the paediatric community we have witnessed a myopia epidemic in young children of primary school age,"



If vision problems are diagnosed early, appropriate treatment is available.

Flaherty says. Research indicates it may be connected to a change in children's lifestyles; but not in the way many people may at first think.

"While it's easy to blame an increased reliance on technological devices, it's actually the extended time indoors that is the true culprit," Flaherty says.

"We now know that sunlight has a protective mechanism on the length of the eyeball."

The recommendation is that children spend at least 10-15 hours a week in sunshine.

The Children's Eye Centre assists children of all ages and adolescents with symptoms as diverse as watery eyes or amblyopia - otherwise known as lazy vision. Treatment for children's eyesight complications can vary, although Flaherty says most patients simply require glasses or a patch.

"At four years old, we still have time to rescue a child's vision with glasses, or patching off the strong eye to force them to use the impaired eye," she says.

"The sooner treatment is commenced, generally the better the visual outcome."



Children's Eye Centre



Dr Maree Flaherty
MB BS(HONS) FRANZCO FRACS
FRCOPHTH



Dr Loren Rose
BSC (HONS) MBBS(HONS)
FRANZCO



Dr Subhashini (Subha) Kadappu
MBBS, MS(OPHTHAL), FRANZCO



Dr Trent Sandercoe
B Med Sci (HONS), MBBS, PHD,
FRANZCO

The Children's Eye Centre is located in Western Sydney (Wentworthville). We are committed to providing the highest possible care to our patients from infancy to adolescence, and offer specialty expertise in the following areas:

- Paediatric ophthalmology
- Visual development
- Strabismus and eye movement disorders
- Genetic eye disease
- Retinopathy of prematurity
- Orthoptic clinics for amblyopia management and non-surgical management of squint
- Goldmann visual fields
- Examinations tailored to suit the age and developmental stage of each child

73 Darcy Rd, Wentworthville, NSW, 2145 T: +(61) 2 9896 4577 F: +(61) 2 9631 5691

www.childrenseyecentre.com.au