



Eyeglasses for Children

From the Eye Examination to the Shopping Experience:
A Guide for Parents

About 80% of what children learn in school comes to them visually. Impaired vision can affect a child's development by limiting both the information he is exposed to and his range of experiences. Buying all the right school books and supplies is useless without the most important learning tool of all: healthy eyesight.

If you have school-age children, you know that there is more to education than simply ensuring your child's safe arrival at school each day. He needs books and supplies, as well as physical check-ups and inoculations to prevent health problems that could impede learning. As important as these steps are, it is equally critical to ensure the health of your child's eyes by taking him or her to an eye care professional for regular comprehensive examinations.

Your child may have already told you that he's having trouble seeing, or will exhibit such symptoms as squinting, holding a book very close to read, complaining of headaches, rubbing his eyes or using a finger to follow along while he's reading. But do not wait for him to display symptoms of poor vision or to tell you about the problem before taking him to an eye doctor. There may be no symptoms, and your child may not even be aware that he has a problem because he might not know what he's supposed to be seeing.

Also, do not be tempted by your busy schedule to leave your child's eye examination solely to the school nurse. In-school screenings are brief tests used to identify potential vision problems; they are no substitute for comprehensive eye examinations performed by an eye doctor.

If you are not sure how often your child should get a comprehensive eye examination, here's what the American Optometric Association recommends:

- Children should have their first eye examination by the age of 6 months.
- A follow-up examination is required by age three.
- At age five or six, just before starting school, take your child to the eye doctor for another thorough check-up.
- School-age children need an eye examination every two to three years after age 5 or 6 if they have no vision problems. If your child requires eyeglasses or contact lenses, however, schedule visits once every 12 months (or according to the eye doctor's recommendations) in order to keep the prescription current.

Strategies for Shopping Success

If your child has had trouble seeing her computer or TV screen recently, you have probably already made a trip to the eye doctor and come away with a prescription for eyeglasses. You may have the following questions:

- How do different frame and lens materials compare, and which are the better choices?
- Which options are worth having?
- If your child is unhappy about having to wear eyeglasses, how will you get him to cooperate in the selection and fitting—and then to actually use them?

Here are a few tips:

- If your child is very young, make sure she knows why she's getting eyeglasses. Tell her that she will be able to see words and pictures in books, as well as her favorite TV show, more clearly. If your grade school child is involved in sports, point out that eyeglasses will improve his performance and his ability to see the ball more clearly.
- Plan to visit the optician at a time when your child is most likely to be in a good mood. For example, right before lunch, when his energy level is apt to be low, is not a good time. Before a youngster's nap is also not recommended.





Frames That Fit

Early in your search for frames, consult with the optician about your child's prescription. If it calls for strong lenses that are likely to be thick, you will want to choose smaller frames so that any lens distortion will be eliminated. The optician can also recommend certain styles that will accomplish this objective.

While your child is trying on frames, look closely at how they fit on the bridge of his nose. Metal frames are usually made with adjustable nose pads, so they fit everyone's bridge, and many manufacturers of plastic frames make their bridges to fit small noses. It is still a good idea, however, to check to see if there is a gap between the nose and the bridge. If there is, the eyeglasses will slide, no matter how well the frame seems to fit.

It is especially important for children's eyeglasses to stay in place, because when eyeglasses slide down the nose, kids tend to look over the tops of the lenses instead of pushing them back up where they belong. When in doubt about a frame's fit, consult the optician

To ensure that eyeglasses do not slide or fall off, you might want to invest in eyeglasses with temples that wrap all the way around the back of the ear. Called "cable temples," this feature is especially useful to keep eyeglasses in place on toddlers. One caveat: If the eyeglasses are not to be worn full-time, these wrap-around temples are not appropriate, as they are awkward to put on and take off. Part-time wearers will find it more convenient to wear regular ("skull") temples, which go straight back and then curve slightly around the ear.

- Involve your child in selecting the frame. If she is the one who chooses the frame, she will be more motivated to wear her eyeglasses and to take care of them.
- Most children do not want to look different from other kids, and initially may feel self-conscious when wearing eyeglasses. You can help prevent this feeling early on by naming examples of people your child likes and admires who also wear them, including family members, friends and celebrities.

When you arrive at the doctor's office or optical center to choose your child's eyeglasses, three concerns should be uppermost in your mind: style, durability and fit.

Fashionable Frames

Why is frame style important for kids? Because when a child likes his eyeglasses, he will want to wear them. Eyeglass manufacturers are designing frames with wide variety of colors, shapes and styles specifically for children. Some are scaled-down copies of adult styles, which many children like because they look more grown-up. Others incorporate the latest pop-culture icons.

Kid-Proof Frames

Sturdy, kid-proof frames are readily available at your optical store or office. Today's eyeglasses for children will hold up to rough-and-tumble activity and accidental flattening against a chair or bed when someone sits on them.

Spring hinges are an especially useful durability feature, especially for toddlers. With a spring hinge connecting each temple to the frame, the temples can flex outward, away from the frame, without causing any damage.

Frame material is another important consideration. In the past, plastic eyeglasses were considered a better choice for children's frames because they were more durable, lighter-weight and less expensive. Today's manufacturers are making metal frames that boast the same qualities. Metal composition varies, so ask the optician for guidance based on his or her experience with different alloys.

Safe Lens Materials

Once you and your child have decided on a frame style, your final decision will be about the lens material you want. This will not be a difficult choice, as eye care professionals recommend impact-resistant polycarbonate lenses for children's eyewear. (Polycarbonate lenses in full for all members' dependent children.)

Never buy lenses made of glass. Glass is not only heavier—and therefore less comfortable to wear—but it can also be dangerous. Even though glass must be safety-treated for use in eyewear, it can still shatter when it breaks and potentially harm a child's eyes.

The polycarbonate material used for eyeglass lenses was developed by the aerospace industry, and is 10 times more impact-resistant than other plastics. These lenses will not shatter or break, saving your child's eyes from being damaged by shards of plastic or glass. Polycarbonate lenses also last longer, holding up to rough play and sports activities. In addition to impact resistance, they offer the following benefits:

- A thinner, lighter weight material than standard plastic or glass, which is more comfortable to wear.
- Ultraviolet protection. Polycarbonate lenses filter out about 99% of potentially damaging UV rays.
- Scratch-resistant coating. The manufacturer adds this coating to keep the lenses undamaged for as long as possible.

Chances are very good that at the end of your eye care visit, you will have chosen a pair of safe and sturdy eyeglasses that you like and that your child will want to wear—and actually have had fun in the process.



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