

Learning To See - Children's Vision by Age

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One of the most treasured moments for parents is when their newborn first opens his or her eyes and makes eye contact with you. But what exactly does your newborn see? An infant's vision takes time to develop.



Babies don't see much detail; in fact, most of their vision is blurred because they can only focus eight to twelve inches in distance. Babies start to learn how to focus by looking at faces. In the first few weeks, an infant will move their entire head to move their eyes but after a couple of months they gradually begin to move their eyes independently and start to develop their visual skills such as eye coordination and tracking. It takes several months for your child's vision to develop. Knowing the stages of your baby's vision and how you can help in their development will ensure your child's vision will be its healthiest.

Did you know even before your baby is born you can help in the development of their vision? During pregnancy, proper nutrition and prenatal care aids in a healthy development of your baby's eyes. From the moment your baby is born there are things you can do to aid in their visual development. A newborn's eyes should be examined and tested for congenital eye problems to decrease the risk of vision problems later in the child's life.

By the time a baby is four months old they begin to reach for objects, showing the beginning of hand and eye coordination and have also developed the ability to see in full color. They become quite skillful at this age and will reach for almost everything they see so watch out! At six to eight months most babies have started to crawl, further developing their eye and

body coordination. By the time a baby turns twelve months old, their visual perception has developed and he or she is now able to notice different shapes and sizes of objects, have integrated vision and fine motor coordination and are reaching for finger foods and holding their own bottles.

A child's vision continues to develop during their preschool years. It is important to continue to help in their development. Help your child by reading a book out loud and letting him/her see the words and pictures on the page. Have your child explore the world of arts and crafts. Stimulating their imagination will also simulate their eyesight.

Your child should have their first eye exam at the age of three years old so that an optometrist can check to make sure their vision is developing normally and also to screen for any possible problems and catch them early on. It's important for children to have their eyes examined before they start school. An optometrist will determine if a child's visual system is adequately prepared to handle reading, writing and other demands school work can put on a child's eyes. Children often do not realize the strain their eyes are under and rarely report any vision problems. This is why it is important that your child has his or her eyes examined regularly. Routine eye exams will check to see if your child's eyes are healthy, and if he or she will need eyeglasses to see clearly.

When your child reaches middle school, eye movements are more refined, for accuracy at near and distance. Did you know your child's visual comfort levels help improve his or her self-confidence? Many children will try their hand at sports while in middle school; playing sports requires tracking ability, and body and eye coordination. Better agility leads to playing better which can enhance your child's confidence level.

Monitoring your child's visual developments is all in preparation for their life ahead. The visual demands of college can be quite stressful on a teenager. While in college, your child will have to deal with a higher level of reading. This requires making their eyes work harder by reading more material, focusing and tracking words in less time while trying to formulate interpretive thinking. Visual accuracy is imperative at this point. As your child is preparing to enter the beginning stages of his or her adulthood, continuing to monitor their vision through regular annual examinations remains an important aspect of your child's growth.

The same can be said after we graduate college and enter the work force except now the responsibility shifts to ourselves as individuals. As your children mature into independent adults, your role in the early stages of their visual development will impact how they maintain the health of their eyes. As adults being aware of the visual demands and stresses our jobs may impose on our eyes is based on the skills we learn and develop as children. As we age, we begin to recognize how our vision adapts to our everyday occurrences.

Vision changes are normal throughout our life which is why we need to be aware of the importance of ensuring our eyes are healthy and functioning at their best. Encourage your child's interest early on by reading, introduction to colors, buying them developmental toys and having their vision examined annually. Being aware of their visual skills throughout their growth will enable you to maintain your child's vision at its healthiest.

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