

Binocular vision disorders: when the eyes do not work as a team

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In short

Binocular vision is how your two eyes aim, focus and work together to give one clear picture. When that teamwork is off, you may get eye strain, headaches or double vision, even with healthy eyes and clear sight. An eye test can check how your eyes team, and your optometrist will advise what may help.

What binocular vision is

To see one clear image, both eyes need to point at the same spot (aiming), focus at the right distance (focusing) and move together (coordination). A binocular vision disorder is a problem with one or more of these.

These problems can happen even when your eyes are healthy and you can read the letter chart clearly. They affect children and adults.

Common signs

- Double vision that comes and goes
- Blurred vision, especially with close work
- Headaches or eye strain with reading or screens
- Losing your place or rereading lines
- Trouble judging distances

Children often do not complain. They may simply avoid reading or other close work that feels hard.

Common types

- **Convergence insufficiency.** The eyes find it hard to turn inwards together for close work. It may be helped by home exercises, therapy sessions in the clinic, or glasses for close work. See our [convergence insufficiency and Brock string guide](#).
- **Strabismus.** One eye turns in, out, up or down. See our [strabismus page](#).
- **Amblyopia.** Vision in one eye has not developed fully, so the eyes do not work together properly. See our [amblyopia page](#).
- **Double vision.** Seeing two images of one thing. If it goes away when you cover one eye, it involves both eyes working together. Double vision that starts in adulthood should always be checked, because it can be a sign of another health condition.

How it is assessed

Your optometrist checks your vision and prescription, then looks at how your eyes line up, move, focus and work together at distance and up close. Tell us what you notice and when, such as headaches after reading or double vision late in the day.

How it may be helped

The plan depends on the type of problem and how much it affects you.

- **Glasses.** Glasses for distance, close work or both, sometimes with prisms built in.
- **Vision therapy.** A programme of exercises designed by your optometrist. Some is done in the clinic and some at home. Regular practice matters.
- **Patching.** Used for some conditions, such as a lazy eye.
- **Referral.** Some people need an ophthalmologist (eye surgeon), for example to discuss surgery for a turned eye.

How often you come back, and how much home practice you do, depend on the problem. Your optometrist will set the plan and review it with you.

When to call us on (03) 9702 9118

- Double vision, even if it comes and goes
- Headaches or eye strain with reading that keep coming back
- Your child avoids reading or loses their place often
- Exercises cause pain, dizziness or nausea

Call (03) 9702 9118

⚠ Call 000, or go to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital emergency department (32 Gisborne Street, East Melbourne, open 24 hours), if

double vision or a turned eye starts suddenly, especially with a severe headache, after a head injury, or with a drooping face, weakness in an arm or slurred speech. A drooping face, arm weakness and slurred speech can be signs of a stroke: call 000 straight away.

To book an eye test, book online or call us on (03) 9702 9118.

FAQs

— Can I have a binocular vision problem if I can see clearly?

Yes. You can read the letter chart well and still have trouble with how your eyes aim, focus or work together. That is why an eye test also checks eye teaming.

— What is vision therapy?

Vision therapy is a programme of exercises, sometimes with lenses or prisms, designed by an optometrist to help the eyes work together. Part of it is usually done at home.

— Is double vision an emergency?

Double vision that starts suddenly needs to be checked urgently. If it comes with a severe headache, after a head injury, or with signs of a stroke, call 000.

— Do adults get binocular vision problems?

Yes. They affect children and adults. In adults, new double vision should always be checked.
