

Strabismus (turned eye): what happens after a check

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In short

Strabismus, also called a squint or turned eye, is when the eyes point in different directions. It is common in young children but can start at any age. After a check, the next steps may include glasses, treatment for a lazy eye, regular reviews, or a referral to an ophthalmologist. Your optometrist will advise what suits you or your child.

What strabismus is

One eye turns in, out, up or down while the other looks straight ahead. The turn may be there all the time, or it may come and go.

Strabismus often runs in families. In children it is often linked to how the eyes focus, for example with long-sightedness, short-sightedness or astigmatism. It can also happen when the nerves or muscles that move the eye are not working properly.

When to have it checked

- Your child has a turned eye all the time
- Your child is older than 3 months and has a turn that comes and goes. In younger babies, a turn that comes and goes is common.
- Your child often turns their head to one side, or keeps one eye closed when looking at things
- You develop a turned eye or double vision as an adult

Rarely, a turned eye in a child can be a sign of a serious eye condition, which is another reason every new turn should be checked.

Why treatment matters

A turned eye is unlikely to get better on its own. In a child, the brain may start to ignore the turned eye, which can lead to a [lazy eye \(amblyopia\)](#). A turned eye can also cause blurred or double vision.

What happens at your check

Your optometrist looks at how the eyes line up and move together, checks the vision in each eye, and tests whether glasses are needed. For a child, a [children's eye test](#) covers these.

What happens next

1 Glasses.

If the turn is linked to a focusing problem such as long-sightedness, glasses may help. Wear them as advised.

2 Lazy eye treatment.

If a lazy eye has developed, it is usually treated first, with patching or eye drops. See our [amblyopia page](#).

3 Eye exercises.

For some types of turn, exercises may help the eyes work together better.

4 Referral.

If needed, we refer you to an ophthalmologist (eye surgeon). Orthoptists often work alongside them, assessing eye movements and helping with non-surgical care.

Surgery or injections.

Surgery moves the muscles that turn the eye, so the eyes line up better. It is done under general anaesthetic, usually takes about an hour, and children usually go home after a few hours. Surgery straightens the eyes but does not improve the vision on its own, so glasses or patching may still be needed. Injections into the eye muscles are another option for some people, and the effect usually lasts less than 3 months.

How often reviews happen

Your optometrist will tell you when to come back. Children whose eyes are well aligned and who do not have a lazy eye are often reviewed every 6 to 12 months, and less often as they get older. During lazy eye treatment, reviews are closer together.

Bring your glasses and any notes about when the turn shows, such as when tired or looking at something far away.

When to call us on (03) 9702 9118

- The turn shows more often, or looks bigger
- Your child closes one eye or tilts their head more often
- Double vision that comes and goes
- Glasses no longer seem to help

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

— Will my child grow out of a turned eye?

A turn that comes and goes is common in babies younger than 3 months. After that, a turned eye is unlikely to get better on its own, so it should be checked.

— Is strabismus the same as a lazy eye?

No. Strabismus is the eye turning. A lazy eye is reduced vision in one eye. A turned eye in a child can lead to a lazy eye, which is why both are checked together.

— Can adults get strabismus?

Yes. It can start at any age. A turned eye or double vision that starts in adulthood should be checked, because it can be a sign of another health condition.

— Can glasses help a turned eye?

Sometimes. If the turn is linked to a focusing problem such as long-sightedness, glasses may help the eyes line up. Your optometrist will advise.
