

OPHTHALMOLOGY

Seeing double

Misaligned eyes cause poor or double vision, and may be socially embarrassing. The good news is that it can be corrected.



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Are you or your child seeing double? This condition called strabismus is more commonly known as a squint. In strabismus, the eye misalignment can occur where one or sometimes both eyes turn inwards, outwards, or less commonly, upwards or downwards.

Causes of strabismus

Most cases of strabismus result from an abnormality of the brain's neuromuscular control of eye movements, a phenomenon not yet well understood.

Occasionally, strabismus can result from conditions affecting the eye muscles, such as fractures of the eye wall with eye muscle entrapment, an overactive thyroid gland, or injuries to the nerves which supply the eye muscles.

In addition, strabismus may be a manifestation of an underlying neurological or brain problem such as raised brain pressure, stroke, and tumour compression of the nerves which supply the eye muscles.



3 MOST OBVIOUS SIGNS OF STRABISMUS

1

Eye misalignment, with one eye in focus and the other deviated away from the central visual axis

2

Seeing two images of an object instead of one

3

Eyes that don't move in a coordinated way

In children, poor vision due to childhood cataract, childhood eye cancer and retinal problems can present with misaligned eyes.

Strabismus can develop at any stage of life. When eye misalignment occurs in children, eye examination is required as soon as possible to prevent the onset of amblyopia, or 'lazy eye', and improve the chances of successful treatment. Amblyopia is a decrease in a child's vision that results when one or both eyes send 'blurry images' to the brain. The brain then 'learns' to see blurry with the affected eye/eyes, even when appropriate glasses are worn.

If a child already has amblyopia due to strabismus, an eye patch over the normal eye may be required to encourage use of the misaligned eye.

In adults with constant eye misalignment, 'double vision' can occur and may be very troubling. Occasionally, instead of outrightly seeing double, adults may experience 'blurriness' of an image.

Depending on the type of strabismus, treatment options range from glasses and eye exercises to surgery which

can resolve double vision and restore the eyes back to normal alignment.

Correcting misconceptions

Many people are unaware that eye misalignment can be corrected. This has resulted in many resigned to living with this condition.

Another misconception is that strabismus surgery is cosmetic in nature. It is about restoring alignment and normal functioning of the eye with far-reaching implications, from arresting developmental issues in children, eradicating double vision to improving self-esteem.

Why surgery?

Age is not a major consideration in strabismus surgery. Therefore an infant with a constant squint which affects vision and three-dimensional vision development would require surgery; an adult with a very well-controlled intermittent squint and excellent vision and three-dimensional vision would not.

Surgery is recommended in several scenarios:

- if squint control is poor or worsens from intermittent to constant misalignment
- if three-dimensional depth perception is deteriorating
- if the patient has adopted an abnormal head posture in order to not see double

Besides the medical implications, people with strabismus often face social discrimination in school or at work. This results in a loss of confidence, problems with interpersonal relationships and loss of employment opportunities. There are viable solutions; people with strabismus need no longer suffer in silence. [👉](#)