**Myopia Matters: Look out for the early warning signs of myopia**

**Author:** Jagrut Lallu is a NZ Optometrist and founding member of the Australia and New Zealand Child Myopia Working Group.

**What is Myopia?**

Myopia is a common eye health condition which causes blurred distance vision (short-sightedness). It usually starts during childhood, typically progressing until the child stops growing.

Myopia is not just an inconvenience. It is often a progressive condition and in most cases of myopia in children, involves excessive eye elongation, leading to stretching and thinning of the tissues within the eye. Although lifetime risks of developing several serious eye conditions increase significantly with higher degrees of myopia, no level is safe.

**The Early Warning Signs to look out for at home or at school**

The first symptom of myopia to be aware of is if your child has difficulty reading road signs and seeing distant objects clearly, although they would be able to see well for close-up tasks such as reading and computer use.

If a child is myopic, they will often shy away from activities, sitting more closely to things they wish to see. Many myopic patients develop skills in other areas which avoid it being picked up. Some sit at the front of the class, copy another student’s work or develop very good audio memories to cope with blurry vision.

It is good to also be aware of what signs may show themselves in the classroom and to discuss with the teacher if you have any concerns. They are:

1. Sitting – is your child sitting closer to the front of the class?
2. Squinting – is your child squinting to see further away?
3. Schoolwork - is your child’s schoolwork performance declining?

**Creating a healthy eye environment**

1. More green time less screen time – get kids outdoors
2. Build in regular breaks from devices at home – every 20 minutes remind your child to have a break for at least twenty seconds and look out a window to something at least six metres away
3. Regular eye examinations with the local optometrist

## Discuss myopia management options

As research and technological innovations in this area continue, optometrists now have an impressive arsenal of new management options which mean they can not only provide clear vision but slow down the progression of myopia.

This makes it crucial for children to have a full eye examination with an optometrist before starting school and then regular visits as they progress through primary and secondary school, as part of their general health regime.

When you go to a local optometrist ask them about the latest research on myopia and the management options best suited to your child.

**Opportunity to take action**

Personally, my poor eyesight was not picked up until I was close to school age. It means that my eyes have been affected significantly. There are certain things that were difficult for me growing up, whether it was the weight of my glasses, the regular change in them or the frustration of not being able to see when playing sport in the rain.

Myopia affects the people who have it in ways that the rest of us can never truly comprehend. Take a look at this [vision simulator](https://www.childmyopia.com/vision-simulator-tool/) to see how vision without spectacles or contact lenses changes as myopia increases.

We need to all work together to win the fight against myopia. By taking action now we have the opportunity to influence the onset and progression of myopia with simple measures – encourage children to spend more time outdoors, have their eyes examined by an optometrist regularly, and reduce the time spent on close-up tasks.

Discuss myopia management with your optometrist and visit [www.childmyopia.com](http://www.childmyopia.com) for more information**.**

*We asked Australian children what they know about myopia and here’s what they said* <https://www.childmyopia.com/videos/myopia-knowledge/>

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**About the Author:**

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The Australia and New Zealand Child Myopia Working Group is a collaboration of leading optometrists and ophthalmologists. The Working Group’s aim is to set a recommended standard of care for child myopia management, in order to slow progression of myopia in children.

**Members are (in alphabetical order):**

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