**Myopia Management. What is it and why is it important?**

**Author:** Margaret Lam, Adjunct Senior Lecturer School of Optometry and Vision Science, Faculty of Science (UNSW), an optometrist that has expertise in myopia management in theeyecarecompany by George and Matilda Eyecare, and founding member of the Child Myopia Working Group.

**If your child has myopia, you may be wondering what can be done to slow its progression?**

Myopia is an eye health condition which causes blurry distance vision (short-sightedness). It usually starts during childhood, typically progressing until the child stops growing. Most cases of myopia in children involve excessive eyeball lengthening, leading to stretching and thinning of the tissues within the eye. This stretching and thinning of the eyeball’s shape and structures causes a much higher risk of sight-threatening vision and health problems for the eye.

Concerningly, studies show there is an exponential increase in risk of eye disease with increased myopia. Although the of risk of developing several serious eye conditions increases significantly with higher degrees of myopia, no level is safe. This is why it is important to manage your child’s myopia.

It’s important to be aware of the different management options now available, because slowing the progression of myopia in children may prevent the development of high myopia. High myopia can cause serious problems like cataract, glaucoma, myopic macular degeneration, or problems with the retina (the sensory layer at the back of the eye). So, this isn’t only about kids having to wear thick glasses, it’s also about reducing the risk of permanent blindness later in life for those that develop higher levels of myopia.

**The importance of regular eye examinations with an optometrist**

Vision screening of children in Australia traditionally occurs at preschool age (4-5 years old). Myopia can occur however at any age until the child stops growing. In some cases, there can be continued increase of myopia past childhood until the child is an adult in their mid-thirties, sometimes even older. It’s important for you to be aware of the potential risk of myopia occurring by organising regular eye examinations with an optometrist.

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

* Pharmacological: low-dose atropine drops
* Contact lenses: special designs of soft contact lenses and orthokeratology lenses
* Glasses: special designs of spectacle lenses

**What can I do to prevent or reduce my child’s myopia from progressing?**

As recommended by Optometry Australia and the New Zealand Association of Optometrists, a child’s first eye test should be with an optometrist before starting school and at regular intervals thereafter.

In addition to this you can follow all the guidance from the optometrist about:

* minimising screen time
* taking short breaks every 20 minutes when doing near close up work such as reading
* using good lighting when reading and doing close-up work
* Spending time outdoors for an average of two hours per day, ensuring good sun protection, may help to reduce the risk of developing myopia

The good news is that technology is changing for the better! There are many eyecare solutions that your optometrist can prescribe that are better than just ordinary glasses to slow down the rate your child’s eyesight worsens. If there is myopia, and it is not corrected, doing nothing means their eyesight gets worse faster.

It really is important to have your child’s eyes examined regularly at least every 12 months for young, growing eyeballs that may be susceptible to vision problems. This is particularly the case if one or both parents are myopic as there is a far greater genetic risk for these children.

A great resource on myopia for parents is [www.childmyopia.com](http://www.childmyopia.com)

*Hear what Aussie children have to say about eye health and what an optometrist does -* <https://www.childmyopia.com/videos/role-of-an-optometrist/>

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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):**

* Dr Rasha Altaie, Ophthalmologist, Auckland
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