



Free eye health checks for children

Eye tests for children are essential health checks and are free for every child under 16 and every young person under 19 if they are in full-time education. They are easy to arrange by phoning your local optometrist to book an appointment.

RNIB
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supporting blind and
partially sighted people



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Why should my child have an eye test?

Eye tests are vital health checks. Common eye conditions such as short or long sightedness, astigmatism or lazy eyes can usually be treated very easily. Glasses are not always needed. However, if they are it is vital they are worn, especially as your child's eyes develop until the age of about seven.

- 1 Eye tests can help to detect some eye conditions before they affect vision.
- 2 Importantly, eye tests can make sure that your child is making the most of their sight and that they can see as clearly as possible. One in five children may be struggling in school because of sight problems that they are not aware of.
- 3 Eye tests can help to detect other health problems such as diabetes at a very early stage.

When can my child have an eye test?

You can start taking care of your child's eyes from a very early age. We advise that your child has an eye test every year from the age of three, unless your optometrist advises otherwise. If you notice a problem earlier it is important that you speak to your health visitor or GP. An eye test can be performed from birth.



What will happen during my child's eye test?

The optometrist will carry out different tests to assess your child's vision and to check the health of their eyes. All the tests are painless. It does not matter if your child does not know the alphabet. The optometrist can use pictures and symbols instead of letters to test your child's vision. The optometrist will also check if your child's eyes work properly together and whether their eyes are developing as expected.

The whole test lasts about 30 minutes and you can stay with your child while the test takes place.

Sometimes, the optometrist may put drops into your child's eyes. These are to make your child's pupils bigger, which makes it easier for the optometrist to carry out the tests.

Where can my child have an eye test?

Optometrists in 'high-street' practices carry out eye health checks. The tests are free, easy to arrange and can take place when it is convenient for you and your child.

What happens after the eye health check?

An eye test does not necessarily mean that your child will be prescribed glasses. If your child does have a prescription after their eye test, they can choose a frame for their glasses from a very wide range designed specifically for children. Frames today are fashionable, practical, comfortable and flexible. They come in all sorts of colours, shapes, designs and materials so that your child will be happy to wear them. The lenses in your child's glasses will probably be plastic as it is lighter and safer than glass.

If your child has an NHS eye test, they will get a voucher to help towards the cost of glasses.

Contact lenses are usually only prescribed to teenagers and young people and are only used for medical reasons in babies and young children. Your optometrist will advise you if contact lenses are an option. Young people need to be comfortable putting the lenses in and taking them out. They also need to fully understand the importance of cleaning, storing and looking after the contact lenses. Frequent aftercare checks are also needed.

How do I know if my child needs an eye test?

Although every child is different, some of the more common signs that your child may benefit from an eye test are:

- Sitting close to the whiteboard in class
- Complaining of headaches, tiredness or eye strain
- Underperforming at school, eg difficulty in concentrating
- Losing their place when reading or using a finger to track text
- Sitting close to the television or computer screen
- Having problems playing ball games
- Closing, itching or covering one or both eyes
- Staying inside on bright days because of the glare.

When you take your child for their eye test, why not book yourself an appointment? Your eye health is important as well!

