

# Common Eye Issues Children Face

by **Dr David Chan** on Apr 19, 2017 | **No comments**

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Healthy eyes are essential to every child’s cognitive development and undiagnosed vision problems can be quite distressing if detected too late. Being aware of some of the conditions and knowing how they can be dealt with could help alleviate some of your anxiety especially if you are a first-time parent.

## 5 Childhood Eye Conditions To Look Out For

### 1. Refractive Errors

Squinting or tilting their head to see better, holding books or iPads close to the eyes or going up close to the television can often be indicative of refractive problems such as near sightedness (myopia). Eye checks at an early age are important, particularly if there is a family history of near sightedness. While myopia cannot be cured, and can be easily corrected by proper eye wear, practising good eye care habits can prevent and also slow down the progression of the condition.

Good eye care habits include making sure that there is adequate light when they are reading or doing home work and teaching them the 20:20:20 eye break rule of relaxing their eyes for 20 seconds after every 20 minutes of reading to look at something 20 feet away. Prevent further eyestrain by cutting back on computer and television watching and spend more time playing outdoors instead.

### 2. Conjunctivitis

One of the most common eye problems that affect children under the age of 5, conjunctivitis is an inflammation caused by bacterial or viral infection that can affect either one or both eyes. Also known as “pink eye”, it causes the affected eye to turn pink and itchy and the lower rim of the eyelids to be red, producing yellowish discharge that crusts up and makes the eyelids stick together while they sleep.

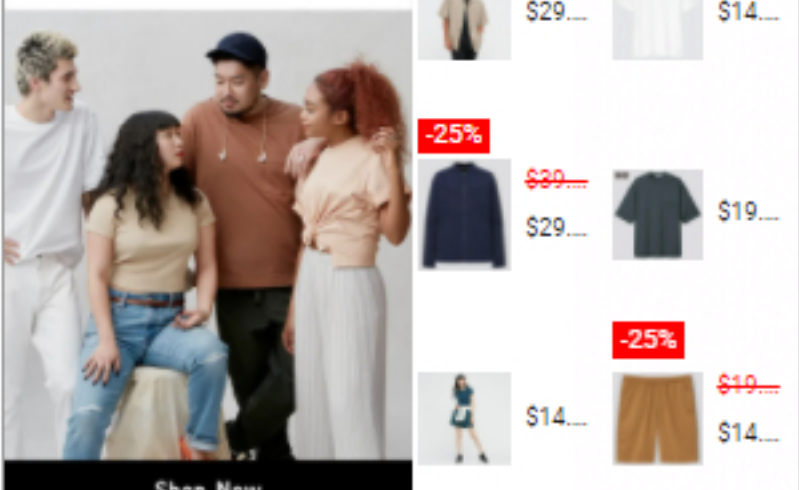
Viral conjunctivitis usually clears up on its own within a few days and the first thing to do is to keep the child at home to avoid infecting others. To provide relief at home, place a cold compress over the affected eye and use a wet towel to gently remove the discharge. Remind your child to wash his hands regularly as it is highly contagious, and ensure your child gets plenty of rest to support his immune system, particularly if it is a viral infection, which can bring about a fever, sore throat and runny nose. Bacterial conjunctivitis can be treated using antibiotic eye drops to aid recovery.

Seek help if your child starts experiencing pain in his eyes, develops sensitivity to light or does not recover after two weeks.

### 3. Lazy Eye

Lazy eye (amblyopia) occurs when the brain has a stronger connection with one eye over the other and eventually stops using the “lazier” eye. It is a condition that can lead to vision problems such as near-sightedness, far-sightedness, astigmatism, and in severe cases permanent vision loss and should be addressed immediately once detected.

Treatment varies depending on the cause and its severity, but the general approach is to start by treating all the underlying issues that is preventing the eye from seeing well such as cross eye (strabismus), childhood cataracts, refractive errors or a droopy eye lid.



Once that has been done, a method to correct this condition is by patching, where the better-seeing eye is used to stimulate the vision in the weaker eye, which helps the parts of the brain involved in vision to develop more completely. The child only needs to wear the patch for a few hours a day, which can be done in the privacy of the home, and progress is usually tracked over a few weeks to months.

Another form of treatment, which is similar in concept to patching, is to use atropine eye drops to temporarily blur the vision in the better-seeing eye once a day to make the lazy eye work harder. This can be just as effective as patching and has been found to encourage better compliance as children do not have the option of taking it off.

### 4. Crossed Eyes

Strabismus or crossed eyes, as it is commonly known, is when both eyes do not work in alignment. Often mistaken as lazy eye, it is caused by an imbalance in the eye muscles that makes both eyes move in different directions.

There are a few treatment options for strabismus including the non-surgical methods of prism eyeglasses, which encourage the eyes to work together, and vision therapy, which is a series of visual activities involving lenses, prisms and computer-led exercises to retrain the eyes and brain to work together.

In some cases, muscle surgery may be necessary to help improve eye alignment and would involve the process of either shortening, lengthening or re-positioning the muscle behind the eye. While surgery can help to physically correct the alignment of the eye, it may need to be followed by vision therapy to ensure the eye does not become misaligned again.

### 5. Cloudy Eyes

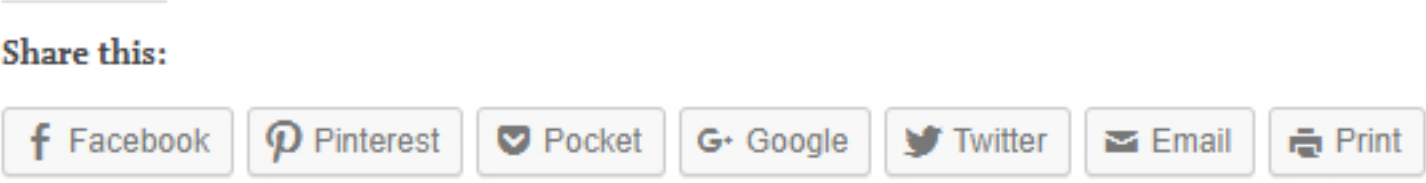
If you notice that the pupil of your child’s eye, which is typically dark, appears to be cloudy or hazy, consult an ophthalmologist to rule out serious eye conditions such as congenital cataracts, paediatric glaucoma, eye tumour and other retina diseases.

Children can be born with cloudy lenses, a condition referred to as congenital cataracts, which can be surgically removed and replaced with an implanted lens to ensure proper development of their vision. In cases where the cataracts are small and only affect the peripheral of the lens, surgery may not be necessary.

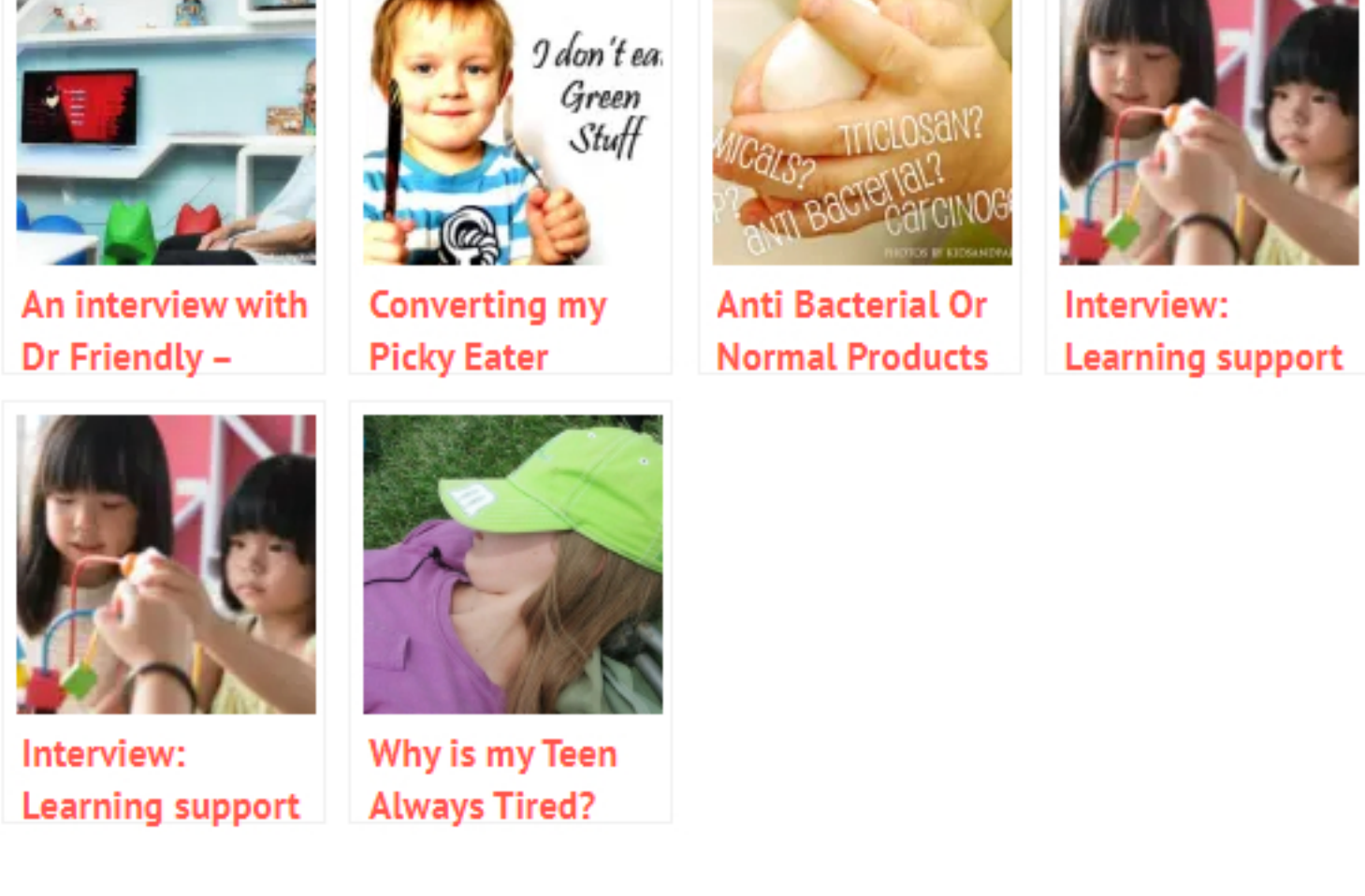
Cloudy eyes could also be a sign of paediatric glaucoma, which occurs when high pressure in the eyes damage the optic nerve, leading to vision impairment. In addition to cloudy eyes, the early signs of childhood glaucoma parents should be aware of include tearing, redness and light sensitivity.

Hopefully with a better grasp on some of the eye conditions that may affect your child, you are better equipped to tackle these issues and keep an early eye on things. When in doubt, consult an eye specialist to ensure the health and safety of your child’s eyes.

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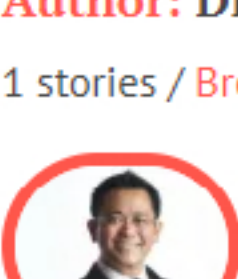


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**Author:** **Dr David Chan**

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Dr David Chan is the Senior Consultant Ophthalmologist and Medical Director of **Atlas Eye Specialist Centre**, with more than 16 years of experience. He has co-authored several books and publications and has been involved in extensive research in his field of expertise.