



## A beginner's guide to myopia in children

# What is myopia?

Myopia is another word for nearsightedness. That's when close-up objects look clear, but ones farther away—like the front of a classroom—look blurry. Myopia is the result of the eye growing faster and longer than it should, becoming weaker along the way. As kids get older, nearsightedness becomes more common.

Here's what you need to know about myopia and how to help your child see better.

## Why is childhood myopia increasing?

Myopia is increasing in the United States. The number of nearsighted adults and kids rose from 25% in the early 1970s to nearly 42% just 3 decades later.<sup>2</sup> “The main reason why we've seen it increase in kids is because they're not spending enough time outdoors in the sunlight,” says Laura Vasilakos, O.D., a developmental optometrist in Hanover, Massachusetts.

Instead, they're spending too much time indoors doing near work on their computers, tablets and cellphones. “The smaller the device, the more problematic it is,” she says. “I'm more concerned about kids spending hours on their cellphones versus just on their computer.”

Genetics can also play a role. When parents have myopia, they may pass it to their children. The chances that a child may develop myopia are 1 in 2 when both parents have myopia, and 1 in 3 when one parent has myopia.<sup>3</sup>

## Will my child outgrow myopia?

Nearsightedness isn't something that goes away. In fact, the younger the child, the faster it may progress—until the eye stops growing, which can be at 16–18 years, and even as late as their early 20s. If left untreated, myopia can increase the risk of vision-threatening conditions later in life, such as glaucoma and cataracts.<sup>4</sup>

Myopia can also affect your child's schoolwork if they aren't able to see things like the smart board at the front of their classroom. Another potential problem? It can cause some of the same symptoms as ADHD, such as trouble sitting still and seeming distracted—which may lead to a misdiagnosis.

“That's why parents need to know the signs of myopia in their kids,” says Vasilakos.



**Myopia is becoming more prevalent, currently affecting:<sup>1</sup>**

**5%**  
of preschoolers

**9%**  
of school-age children

**30%**  
of teens



# How do eye doctors treat myopia?

While eye doctors can't cure or reverse myopia, they can prescribe eyeglasses or contact lenses so that your child can see clearly again.

According to Vasilakos, children who develop severe myopia may "have a higher risk of developing eye diseases later in life," including glaucoma, cataracts and others.<sup>7</sup>

## Myopia-management treatment

Here are a few options known to slow the progression of myopia as a child grows.

- 1 Atropine eye drops**– These are the same eye drops that eye doctors use to check vision during an exam. "In low doses they may help slow myopia," says Vasilakos. In a study, kids between the ages of 4 and 9 who were given these drops every night for 2 years were much less likely to go on to develop myopia.<sup>8</sup>
- 2 Myopia control soft contact lenses (MiSight 1 day)**– These are known as peripheral defocus contact lenses. The center of the lens corrects distance vision so that your child can see. The outer portion redirects light to get the eye growth back on track. When can kids start wearing them? "I'll consider them in kids as young as 7 or 8, if I think they are mature enough to handle contact lenses," Vasilakos says.
- 3 Myopia control spectacles**– These are specifically designed to slow myopia progression by correcting nearsightedness in the center of the lens and applying peripheral defocus on the outer edges. They are used in Europe and Canada and are awaiting U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval.<sup>9</sup>
- 4 Orthokeratology (ortho-K)**– While kids sleep, these firm contact lenses reshape and flatten the central cornea. "They wake up with clear vision," says Juanita Collier, O.D., an optometrist and owner of 4D Vision Gym in Cromwell, Connecticut. Once your child stops wearing the lens, their cornea gradually goes back to its original shape. While these lenses correct eyesight only temporarily, they have been shown to slow the progression of myopia over time.



## Signs your child may be nearsighted:<sup>5</sup>

- Needs to sit at the front of the classroom
- Sits very close to the TV screen
- Squints, rubs their eyes or blinks a lot
- Often complains of headaches
- Holds books very close to their face
- Seem to have a short attention span
- Complains of double vision

## Next steps to take:

Set up a comprehensive eye exam with an optometrist right away. Ideally, kids should get exams at these ages:<sup>6</sup>

- 6 months to 2 years
- 3 years
- 5 to 6 years (before starting school)
- Annually throughout their school years

Most kids tend to become nearsighted (or notice it) around third grade, Vasilakos adds.

# How to help slow the progression of nearsightedness

While eye doctors can help your child see more clearly, there are things you can do for your child at home that may help prevent or at least slow the onset or progression of myopia.

- ✓ **Limit their screen time.** Kids who spend most of their time on both a smartphone and a computer have an 80% higher risk of developing myopia, according to the American Optometric Association.<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ **Send them outside.** Being outdoors also helps boost vitamin D levels. “Low levels of the sunshine vitamin have been associated with an increased risk of nearsightedness,” Collier says.



## Get more info

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. Myopia (Nearsightedness) in Children & Teens. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/eyes/Pages/Myopia-Nearsightedness.aspx>. May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> JAMA Ophthalmology. Reducing the Progression of Myopia. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2769247>. August 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Optician. C52102: Is myopia control the next contact lens revolution? <https://www.opticianonline.net/cpd-archive/127>. Accessed Sept. 29, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Ophthalmology. Nearsightedness: What is Myopia? <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/myopia-nearsightedness>. September 2022.

<sup>5</sup> American Academy of Ophthalmology. Myopia. <https://eyewiki.aao.org/Myopia>. August 2023.

<sup>6</sup> American Optometric Association. School-Aged Vision: 6 to 18 Years of Age. <https://www.aao.org/healthy-eyes/eye-health-for-life/school-aged-vision?sso=y>. Accessed Sept. 29, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> American Optometric Association. Myopia (nearsightedness). <https://www.aao.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions/myopia?sso=y>. Accessed Sept. 29, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> American Optometric Association. Study: Could atropine delay or prevent myopia in children? <https://www.aao.org/news/clinical-eye-care/public-health/myopia-drops>. March 2023.

<sup>9</sup> JAMA Ophthalmology. Spectacle Lenses With Aspherical Lenslets for Myopia Control vs Single-Vision Spectacle Lenses: A Randomized Clinical Trial. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35357402/>. May 2022.

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