

Vision Care for a Lifetime of Good Health

Maintaining Eye
and Vision Health
at Every Age and Stage



vsp
vision care

Eyes are among the most complex organs in the body. They receive, filter, and transform light through photoreceptors that are quickly sent to the brain to help people see and experience the world around us.¹ This is just one of the many ways vision and eye health play a huge role in overall well-being.

Visual needs change throughout the course of your life, reinforcing the importance of taking care of your eyes at every age.

See Well and Be Well at Every Age

Age	Recommend Frequency	Frequency for At-Risk Individuals
0-1	At 6 months and at 12 months	At 6 months and at 12 months
2-5	At least once	At least once or as recommended based on risk
5-18	Before grade 1 then annually	Before grade 1 then annually or as recommended based on risk
19-40	Annually	Annually or as recommended based on risk
41-60	Annually	Annually or as recommended based on risk
61+	Annually	Annually or as recommended based on risk

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Newborns

Over the first year of their life, infants develop their ability to see. This typically starts with adjusting to and developing the capacity to filter light as a newborn, to eventually being able to decipher the visual signals needed to react to their environment, touch and hold objects, see color, and eventually crawl and walk.²

Young children typically have vision screenings, versus eye exams. A child's first vision screening typically takes place immediately following birth, when a trained health professional conducts a newborn eye screening (NES) to assess eye health. This typically involves:³

- Checking for “red reflex” (like seeing red eyes in a flash photograph)
- Blink and pupil response

This may be accompanied by a more in-depth eye exam if the NES is inconclusive or there are genetic or other risk factors for eye disease.

The second eye health screening may be done at a child's six-month well-child visit. A pediatrician or other health care professional will repeat the NES tests, inspect the eyes, and check for developmentally appropriate alignment and movement.⁴ If concerns are raised, the child may be referred to an eye doctor for a thorough eye examination. An eye doctor can assess whether the infant is developing nearsightedness, farsightedness, or an astigmatism.⁵



Early Childhood

Many of the key developmental milestones of early childhood are centered around strengthening the relationship between the eye and the brain. Eye-hand coordination, fine motor skills, and the recognition and comprehension abilities needed to talk, read, and write all require progressively complex interactions between the signals we receive in our eyes and the way the brain interprets them.⁶

Children who are developing without eye or vision issues should visit the eye doctor for their first comprehensive exam at age three.⁷ During the exam, which doesn't require the ability to read

or recognize letters and numbers, the eye doctor will check for:⁸

- Visual acuity
- Refractive errors (e.g., nearsighted or farsighted)
- Amblyopia or lazy eye
- Strabismus or crossed eyes
- Additional non-strabismic binocular vision problems and related accommodative disorders (e.g., eye movement disorders, trouble focusing)
- Color vision deficiency
- Ocular disease

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Screening versus exam

While many community-based organizations and schools may provide—or even require—vision screenings for children, these shouldn't replace a comprehensive eye exam. **“A vision screening serves to detect the presence of ocular or visual health issues and with that detection, a referral is made to a local optometrist to complete a comprehensive eye examination,”** says Dr. Danielle Richardson from Los Angeles. She continues, **“The difference between the two is that a comprehensive eye exam actually diagnoses visual health issues and ocular conditions in a way that a vision screening just can't, simply because there's a difference in equipment and in the depth of the examination.”**⁹

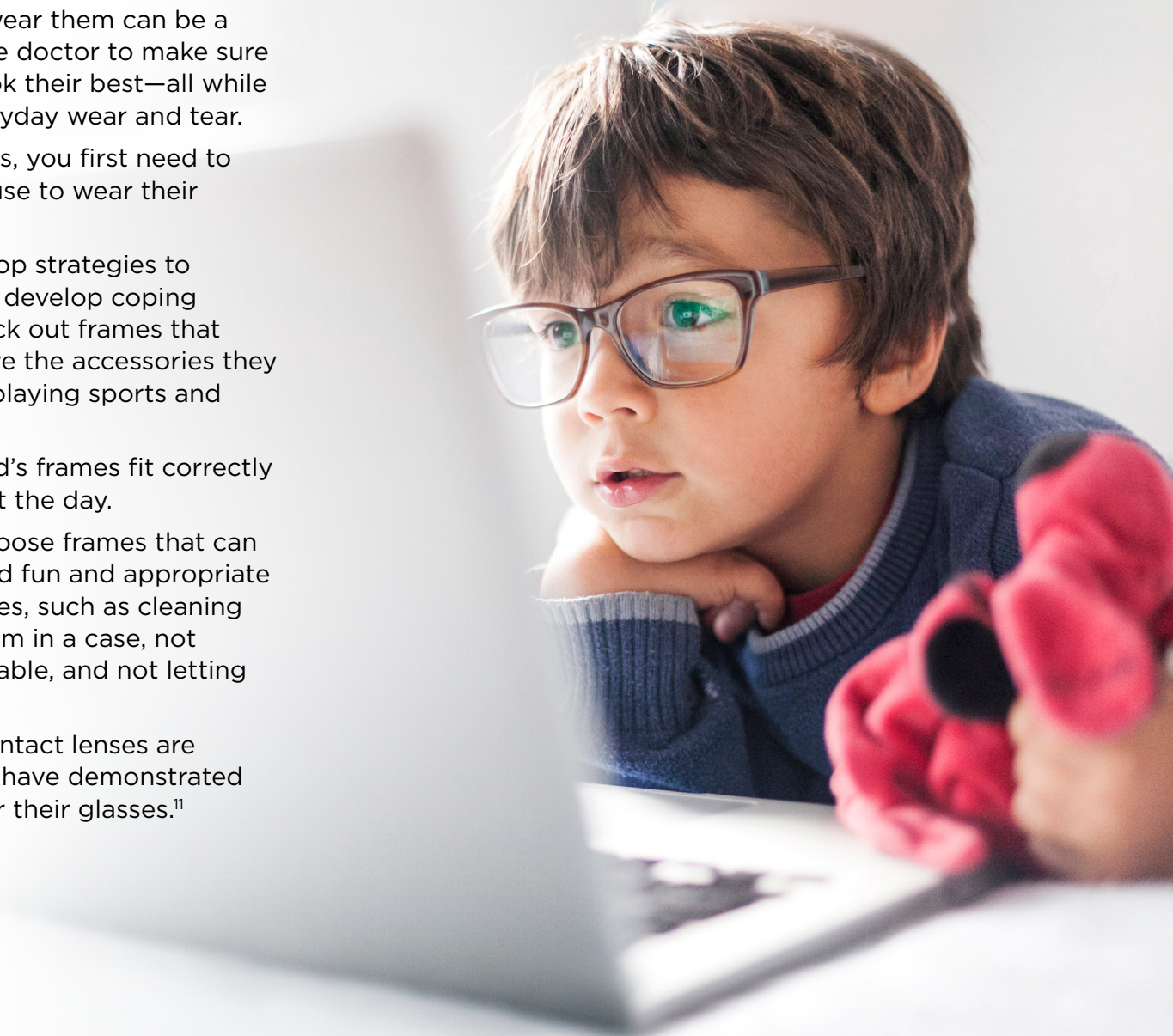
Kids and Glasses¹⁰

No matter the reason a child needs to wear glasses, choosing the right ones and getting your child to wear them can be a challenge. Parents can work with their eye doctor to make sure kids see their best, feel their best, and look their best—all while ensuring their glasses will hold up to everyday wear and tear.

To help children overcome potential issues, you first need to understand the reasons a child might refuse to wear their glasses:

- Social concerns—Understand and develop strategies to prevent the issues and/or help the child develop coping mechanisms and resilience. Let them pick out frames that appeal to them, and make sure they have the accessories they need to safely wear their glasses while playing sports and other games.
- Physical discomfort—Make sure the child's frames fit correctly and are comfortable to wear throughout the day.
- Emotional or developmental issues—Choose frames that can withstand the child's specific needs. Find fun and appropriate ways for the child to care for their glasses, such as cleaning them with proper products, keeping them in a case, not bending them if they don't feel comfortable, and not letting friends play with them.

Contact lenses may also be an option. Contact lenses are generally safe for children, provided they have demonstrated responsibility both wearing and caring for their glasses.¹¹



School-Age

Having good vision plays a crucial role in a child's physical development, overall well-being, and success. Helping a child see their best is essential to helping them reach their potential in classroom learning, athletics, and other activities.

One out of four children struggles with reading and learning because of undiagnosed vision problems.¹² Common vision problems in children include:¹³

- Refractive errors, such as myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism. Most refractive errors can be corrected with prescription glasses or contacts.
- Crossed eyes (strabismus) occur when the eye(s) turns in or out, resulting in

the eyes looking in different directions. Once diagnosed, eye doctors may treat using glasses or contacts, special lenses, vision therapy, and in severe cases, surgery.

- Lazy eye (amblyopia) occurs when the brain favors one eye over the other. To correct this condition, the eye doctor will focus on strengthening the weaker eye, often by having the child wear an eye patch over the stronger eye.

All these conditions can be diagnosed in a comprehensive eye exam, which school-aged children should receive at least once every two years. If they have identified vision or eye health issues, an annual eye exam is recommended.

Parents can help their school-aged children learn how to protect their eyes from injury by:

- Ensuring they wear sunglasses that provide 99–100% UVA/UVB protection and are appropriately sized for their head and face when in the sun.¹⁴
- Providing them with protective goggles to wear during sports.¹⁵
- Setting and maintaining boundaries to protect them from eye strain that results from too much screen time. If a child wears glasses, ask their eye care team about the benefits of blue light lens coating.¹⁶

1 out of 4

children struggles with reading and learning because of diagnosed vision problems.



Early Adulthood

The vision system is fully developed by early adulthood and typically remains stable until at least middle adulthood.¹⁷ During this period, the biggest risks for most adults are eye injuries. The American Academy of Ophthalmology reports that nearly half of all eye injuries happen in or around the home, most often during improvement projects or sports.¹⁸

To promote healthy vision, adults are encouraged to maintain the same healthy vision care habits they cultivated in childhood:

- Wear protective goggles for sports, home improvement projects, and other vigorous outdoor activities.
- Also wear protective goggles if working in an environment where eye injury is possible (e.g., construction, manufacturing, some healthcare fields).
- Wear sunglasses with 99–100% UVA/UVB protection when outside in daylight.
- Reduce the possibility of digital eye strain and the contributing factors by minimizing screen time and wearing glasses with blue lens coating.

It is recommended that adults—even those with healthy eyes and/or good vision—have a comprehensive eye and vision examination every year to optimize visual function, evaluate eye changes and provide for the earlier detection of sight-threatening eye and systemic health conditions. Annual exams are likely to result in earlier diagnosis of eye and vision problems and prevent later vision loss.¹⁹ Adults with chronic diseases that impact the eye (e.g., diabetes)—may be required to get a comprehensive eye exam more frequently to monitor for complications.²⁰

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Middle Adulthood

As one approaches middle adulthood, it is not uncommon to start noticing small changes in one's vision. Some common eye and vision changes in this age group include:²¹

- Trouble reading fine print—reading glasses, new prescription lenses, and refractive surgeries can help address this issue.
- Increased dry eyes—the older we get, the fewer tears we tend to produce, which can lead to dry eyes.
- Trouble seeing at night—this is likely because our eye rod cells weaken, making it more challenging to see in low light.

People who already wear prescription lenses may experience a decline in their vision, requiring a stronger prescription, or even needing to graduate to bifocal or progressive lenses.²²

Preventive care during this age period is important because research shows that by age 65, 33% of Americans will have a vision-impairing eye disease including:²³

- Cataracts
- Glaucoma
- Diabetic retinopathy
- Age-related macular degeneration

Most of these diseases may not have symptoms in the early stages, making early detection by an eye doctor important. Receiving a comprehensive eye exam once a year or as recommended for healthy adults ages 41–65 can help detect these and other issues early.²⁴ This improves the chance to maintain good vision into late adulthood.

33%

of Americans will have a vision-impairing eye disease by age 65.



Senior Adulthood

Many adults aged 60 and older may begin to experience age-related changes to their vision. This can include declines in:²⁵

- Visual acuity, which can affect the ability to read, drive, and fully participate in sports and other hobbies.

- Ability to adapt to changes in light, which can contribute to difficulty driving at night.
- Peripheral awareness, depth perception, and focusing ability, which can contribute to higher risk of falling.²⁶

Senior adulthood is also the time when the risk for eye diseases like glaucoma, cataracts, age-related macular degeneration, dry eye, and retinal

detachments increases. Senior adults are advised to get a comprehensive eye exam every year. During these exams, the eye doctor will be able to detect vision and eye health issues. They can also identify signs of up to 270 other acute and chronic diseases that present through the eyes, like diabetes and high blood pressure.²⁷

Treatment for vision and eye health problems can range from recommending changes to work and driving habits, to the prescription of stronger glasses and assistive devices, to surgical interventions. If an eye doctor identifies a potential indicator of a health issue outside of the eye, they can communicate this to both the patient and their primary care provider, playing an important role in delivering whole-person care.





How
can
VSP
help?



With 60 years of experience working with health plan partners providing vision coverage for members of all ages—from employee benefits to Medicare Advantage and everything in between—VSP® is your trusted advisor for vision care that your members want most.

Contact us to schedule a free consultation with VSP.

VSP and VSP network doctors help keep the focus on maintaining eye and vision health across a member's lifecycle.

Features of VSP benefit plans include:

1

Access to information about in-network eye doctors' experience with infants and toddlers, children, and senior adults—directly in the online find-a-doctor tool

2

Flexible benefit plans that evolve to meet the age-related needs of members, including coverage for detection, prevention, and treatment of age-related eye disease

3

A wide variety of eyeglass and lens options—from flexible and durable glasses for children, to blue light lens coating for people with heavy screen use, to stylish and functional prescription sunglasses for people who spend a lot of time outdoors

4

Access to information about in-network eye doctors' experience with preventive therapies, and special training in treating diabetic eye disease—directly in the online find-a-doctor tool

5

Comprehensive, member-focused online eye health information library



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