



# DOES JUNIOR NEED GLASSES?

Not sure if your child needs glasses? Here are the signs to watch out for.

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It is no secret that vision problems among children are common in Singapore. This is no surprise, considering how much time children here spend on near work, whether it be from school work or using their smartphones and tablets. Of course, genetics play a part too. If you and/or your spouse have a vision problem,

it is more likely that your child will develop it as well.

According to Dr Cheryl Ngo from the Ophthalmology Department at National University Hospital, the most common vision problems afflicting school-age children are refractive errors including myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism.

## Myopia

Also known as short-sightedness, myopia means one is able to see objects near to them clearly, but objects from a distance are blurred. This eye condition is prevalent among Singaporean children. According to the Health Promotion Board, Singapore ranks number one globally for

childhood myopia among seven to nine-year-olds.

## Hyperopia

This is a less common eye condition afflicting school-age children in Singapore. Hyperopia, or long-sightedness, refers to one who is able to see distant objects clearly, while objects up close appear blurred.

## Astigmatism

Astigmatism is a result of an abnormal curvature of the cornea, which causes changes when light enters the eye, leading to blurred vision. Astigmatism typically occurs together with other eye conditions like myopia and hyperopia.

## Does My Child Need Glasses?

One of the ways to correct all these eye conditions is through wearing glasses. But how do you know if your child even needs them in the first place? Here are the signs you should look out for:

### Sitting too close to the television

If you find your child always sitting really close to the television, despite you telling them to watch it from further away, that might indicate your child having difficulty seeing things from a distance.

### Holding hand-held devices close to their eyes

Don't just pay attention to what your child is watching or playing on their smartphone or tablet. Take note of how close they hold their device to their eyes too. It might mean that your child is unable to see the images clearly when the device is held further away from them.

### Difficulty reading from a distance

A sign of myopia is if your child reads with their book held close to their eyes. Your child might also lower their

head closer to the book so they can see the words better.

### Squinting

If your child tends to squint when they are looking at a distant object, or when they are trying to read from a distance, this indicates a possibility of myopia too. Squinting helps your child's eyes to focus on the image or object more clearly.

### Tilting or turning one's head

According to Dr Ngo, a child who tends to have a head tilt or turn may indicate a possible eye condition. "At times, the child may turn or tilt their head to the side if they have a significant refractive error, particularly for the condition of astigmatism," she says.

"It is thought that the head turn allows the child to see better since they are looking through the narrowed eyelids, which may simulate a "squinting" mechanism," adds Dr Ngo.

### Excessive eye rubbing

Rubbing eyes excessively may be an indication of eye fatigue or eye strain, possible due to overexerting the eyes to see more clearly. This can be a sign of any type of vision problem, so be sure to get your child's eye checked as soon as possible.

### Complaints of headaches

Yes, headaches can also be a sign that your child has a vision problem. This is due to your child straining their eyes too much in order to focus their blurred vision, thus overexerting their eyes.

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**Complaints of eye pain can also be another indication that your child is overexerting their eyes due to their vision problem.**

### Difficulty in school

A child who is having trouble in school is usually thought to be a slow learner or is unable to focus properly in class. If your child is having problems in school and their school work, consider the possibility that they might have a vision problem, especially if they display the rest of the signs above as well.

A child who is unable to see properly, particularly if they are myopic, will have difficulty paying attention in class as they are unable to see what their teacher is writing on the board. Your child might also find it hard to switch their focus between near and distant objects.

Check with your child's teacher on how your child behaves in class, such as whether they complain about not being able to see the board, or if they lose their focus easily in class. These are all possible indications that your child has a vision problem.

## What You Can Do

If your child has a vision problem, the most common way to correct it is through wearing glasses. However, this is not a cure.

Vision problems can worsen over time, especially if your child does not practise good eye care habits, or if the vision problem is not corrected as soon as possible. Teach and instil in your child the following habits to prevent their vision problems from worsening.

### Schedule regular check-ups

Make regular appointments for your child to get their eyes checked to monitor their eye health. If your child is already wearing glasses, regular check-ups are still essential for them. This will help to monitor the condition of your child's eyes, and to detect any possible worsening of your child's vision problem.



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Bringing your child for an eye appointment regularly will help them adopt this habit too, all the way to adulthood. This ensures their eyes are in the best condition possible, for as long as possible.

**Wear correct prescriptive glasses**

Another important note is to ensure that your child is wearing the correct prescriptive glasses, advises Dr Ngo. Wearing the wrong prescriptive glasses

can cause your child's vision problem to worsen. This is also why scheduling regular eye check-ups are essential; your child's eye doctor will be able to track if your child's prescription needs to be changed, thus ensuring your child is always wearing glasses best for his eye health.

**Take breaks frequently**

Dr Ngo recommends parents to allow their child eye breaks every 30 minutes of doing near work. "Closing or resting the eyes, as well as looking out faraway both allow the eye muscles to relax, especially when the child has been doing near work for some time," says Dr Ngo.

This point cannot be emphasised enough, especially in a country like Singapore where children spend a large amount of time on their school work as well as on their smartphones and tablets. Let your child take frequent breaks from their school work, and limit their time spent on hand-held devices.

**Go outside!**

Encourage your child to play outdoors, instead of staying cooped up at home all the time. This will not only reduce the time spent on near work but also allow your child to get physically active, all of which is great for their health. [m](#)