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## Keep an Eye on Your children's vision: *How to Prevent and Treat a Common Condition Called Myopia*

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**T**hirty percent of people have an eye condition called myopia, or nearsightedness. One of the most common reasons for wearing glasses or contact lenses, having myopia means you can see well up close but need glasses or contacts to see the blackboard, TV, movies or play sports. While old wives tales abound, recent studies are the most reliable source as to the causes, prevention and best treatments to help our kids see well throughout their lives.

A number of factors influence your child's chances of developing myopia. Family history is one leading factor (six in ten children whose parents have myopia will develop it, with increased risk if both parents are myopic). Ethnicity is another (Asian children have higher incidences of myopia). Pre-existing medical conditions, such as diabetes and

cataracts, can contribute. Even the environment plays a role (higher incidences in urban areas of Hong Kong and Singapore than in rural areas). There is no doubt that lifestyle also contributes. The Sydney Myopia Study showed that close reading distance (less than 30 centimeters) and continuous reading (greater than 30 minutes) increased the risk of myopia in school children. Not spending enough time outdoors may also contribute to higher risk of myopia.

### **What can I do to help my child avoid needing glasses?**

Numerous studies have found that engaging in at least 14

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hours of outdoor activity per week can counteract the heightened hereditary risk of having two myopic parents (reducing risk to two in ten children). A good preventative technique is to keep near objects more than 30 centimeters away from the eyes and take frequent breaks from near work-both of which can reduce the incidence of myopia. Have your kids look up and out of the window or walk away from their desk at least every 30 minutes to allow their eyes a chance to focus on objects at a distance.

It is very important to have your child's vision formally tested by an ophthalmologist or an optometrist, starting at

the age of three. Testing earlier may be necessary if there are special health care needs or if there is family history of ‘lazy eye’, cross eyes, strabismus or muscle surgery. If diagnosed, myopia is corrected with glasses (contact lenses for older youth and laser treatments or implantable lenses for adults).

### Is there a role for Laser Vision Correction in kids?

Laser Vision Correction is FDA-approved starting at 18 years of age, as long as vision has not changed by more than 0.5 diopter units over the last year. Laser Vision Correction in kids under than 18 is generally not recommended, unless there are special circumstances or vision needs. Laser Vision Correction in kids should be discussed with a pediatric ophthalmologist and can be recommended when a child has a large prescription and doesn’t want to or can’t wear glasses or contact lenses. It may also be appropriate for some kids

with “lazy” eye, cross eyes or strabismus. If it is recommended for your child, be sure you have access to a facility experienced in performing laser eye surgery in children.

While you can’t change your child’s genes, teaching them to take care of their eyes can go a long way to preventing the need for glasses. And what a great excuse to spend lots of time outdoors playing with your children! ■

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### DO’S AND DON’TS: PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

**DO:** Have your child’s vision tested every year (and test each eye separately as each eye may require unique correction). If vision is not properly corrected while the child is young, eyes may not develop neurologically, resulting in a condition called amblyopia or “lazy eye.” Once amblyopia develops, the eye can never see well, even if it is later corrected with glasses or contact lenses, and the condition could result in poor depth perception, strabismus or “cross eyes.”

**DO:** Have your child keep their books, toys or TV more than 30 centimeters (approximately one foot) away from their eyes.

**DO:** Encourage frequent breaks from near work: look up and into the distance every 30 minutes.

**DO:** Make sure that your child spends at least 14 hours a week outdoors.

**DO:** Consider vision correction surgery for youth over 18.

**DON’T:** Worry that wearing glasses or contacts will worsen myopia. It may or may not progress regardless of wearing glasses or contacts. Prescriptions often stabilize by 18 years of age.

