

Seeing

Eye tests are given to babies and children to find out if there are any problems.

Serious problems are rare, but early tests mean problems can be picked up and dealt with as early as possible.

Why eye tests are important?

Eye tests soon after your baby is born can spot some eye problems. Later tests can spot problems that were missed or problems that develop as your child gets older.

Children may not know they have a problem with their eyes, so without tests problems might not be spotted for months or years.

It is important for eye problems to be picked up as early as possible, because eye problems can have a big impact on their life and their education.

Eye problems are easier to fix when your child is young.

This is because vision keeps developing until a child is six or seven years old. Finding a problem early will often mean the problem can be put right with treatment or glasses without any harm to the child's normal development. If you leave it later to seek help, the child may be left with a long term difficulty. As problems are not always easy to notice in a small child, checks are very important.

When will my child's eyes be checked?

- The first check will be in the first three days of your baby's life – this is to check for very clear problems
- The next check will be when your child is six to eight weeks old – this is to check for problems that were not clear soon after your baby was born
- When your child is one year old to two-and-a-half years old, you may be asked if you have any worries about your child's eyes. Eye tests will be carried out if needed
- Your child may also have a check when they start school at four or five years old

You should also get your child's eyes tested at least every two years. These tests can be done at an opticians and are free for all children under 16 years old. The tests are also free for 16 to 19 year olds in full-time education.

Speak to your GP or health visitor if you have any concerns about your child's eyes at any time.

Signs of an eye problem

As well as regular eye tests, it is important to look for signs of problems and get advice if you have worries.

For babies, there is a list of things to look for in your baby's child health record – also called the red book.

For older children, signs of an eye problem can include:

- the eyes not facing the same way
- headaches or eye pain
- problems reading – like needing to hold books close to their face or losing their place as they read
- problems with hand-to-eye co-ordination – like finding it difficult to catch a ball
- being clumsy – like walking into things or dropping things often
- rubbing their eyes a lot

Speak to your GP or health visitor if you have any worries about your child's eyes. They can have an eye test at any age.

Problems with your child's eyes cannot always be fixed if left for too long, so it is important to keep appointments for eye checks and to raise any worries as soon as possible.