

Orthoptic Department

Exotropia (divergent squint)

What is a squint?

A squint occurs when one eye turns and stops working with the other eye. The eye may turn in towards the nose or outwards, or occasionally upwards or downwards.

An exotropia, or divergent squint, is when an eye turns outwards.



Exotropia (divergent squint)

You can have squints that are there all the time (constant) or a squint that appears occasionally and the eyes are straight the rest of the time (intermittent).

Constant exotropia

This is an outward turning eye which is present all the time. Squints can vary in size.

Sometimes the squint can swap between the eyes, known as an alternating squint. In this case the vision is usually similar in both eyes. If the squint is constantly in one eye, the vision may be reduced, and treatment may be needed to improve the vision.



What is an intermittent exotropia?

When there is an outward turning of an eye that only happens some of the time, it is called **intermittent exotropia**. It can be present looking at near or distant objects.

Near intermittent exotropia

This is when the eye deviates outwards when looking at near objects. Symptoms may include blurred or double vision, headaches or no symptoms at all.

Distance intermittent exotropia

The eye turns outwards when looking at distance objects. This type of squint can cause symptoms that include closing one eye in bright lights or on sunny days, rubbing one eye, or experiencing double vision when looking in the distance. Parents often see one eye drifting out when the child is poorly, tired, day dreaming or looking upwards.

It can be difficult to diagnose and measure when the child is very young as concentration may be limited, but accurate measurements are essential if surgery is needed.

Non-specific exotropia

The eye turns outwards intermittently but doesn't follow a pattern.

Treatment for intermittent exotropia

Treatment could be one or more of the following:

- Watchful waiting - to monitor the squint.
- Glasses - to help control of the squint.
- Patching - if reduced vision is found in one eye.
- Prisms - as a short term solution in cases where diplopia (double vision) is present and/or to encourage 3D vision.
- Surgery - if the squint is large, 3D vision has deteriorated or if symptoms are not resolved by other treatments.

What causes a squint?

In some cases short sightedness is associated with this type of squint, and the child needs to wear glasses. In other cases there may be no obvious reason. However, in many cases, there is a history of glasses and/or squint in the family.

Will my child grow out of a squint?

No, not usually - although some squints improve as the child gets older.

Will my child need treatment?

It is very important that if glasses are prescribed they are worn as advised. Poor compliance with glasses wear can lead to delay in other treatments.

A squint may need various types of treatment - glasses, patching and /or surgery. If there is reduced vision, patches or atropine eye drops can be used to improve the vision in the squinting eye. To achieve the best results this form of treatment should be underway as early as possible. Some squints need surgery to straighten the eyes.

Who will treat my child's eyes?

There will be several people who will look after your child's eyes and they all work together as a team in this care.

The **Ophthalmologist** (eye doctor) will be responsible for your child's general eye care and will carry out any surgery necessary.

The **Orthoptist** (a specialist in the treatment of squint and children's eye development) will monitor the development of sight and will advise you of any treatment the child needs.

The **Optometrist** will test your child for glasses and advise you when changes are needed.

How long does the treatment take?

This varies from patient to patient. The only general rule is that with a squint a good result is easier to achieve if treatment is started at an early age.

How do I find out about my child's eye condition?

Ask any of the eye care professionals dealing with your child's eyes. Every case is different and they will answer any questions you may have.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this Information in another language or format please contact us on 024 7696 6520 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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