

Squints and Lazy Eye



Understanding Squint and Lazy Eye

Having two eyes working together as a team gives us clear, single vision and a sense of depth. Sometimes, though, one eye may not align or focus properly with the other. This can lead to a **squint** or a **lazy eye**.



Both conditions are fairly common in children and can usually be treated successfully—especially when detected early. Understanding the difference between them is the first step in protecting good vision.

What Is a Squint?

A squint, also called strabismus, is when the eyes point in different directions.

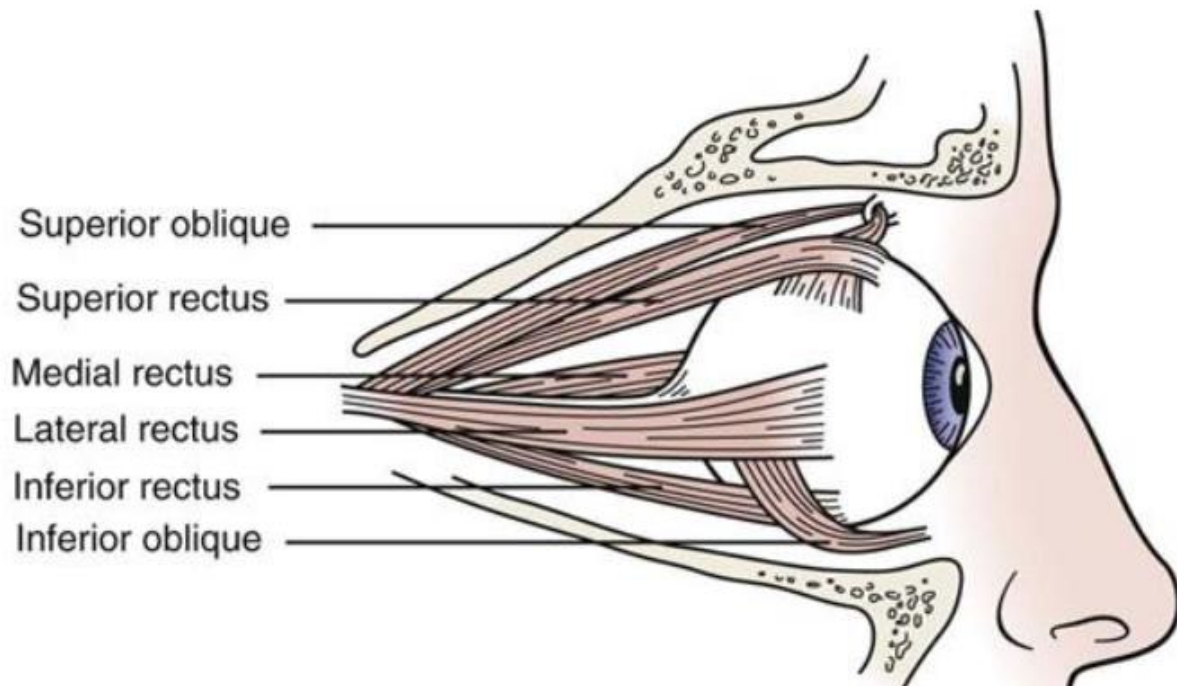
While one eye looks straight ahead, the other might turn:

- Inward (cross-eyed)
- Outward
- Upward
- Downward



This misalignment can happen all the time or intermittently, such as when a person is tired, focusing on something close, or feeling unwell.

Squints can occur in one eye or alternate between both eyes.



What Causes a Squint?

There are several possible causes for a squint, including:

- **Muscle imbalance:** The eye muscles that control movement may not work together properly.
- **Refractive error:** if there is a significant long-sighted (hyperopic) prescription, when the eyes compensate by focusing, they also turn inward due to the natural reflexes.
- **Family history:** Squints often run in families.
- **Nerve or brain development issues:** Rarely, other neurological problems can be involved.

Sometimes, the exact cause isn't known. What's important is that a squint is always checked by an eye doctor as soon as it's noticed.

What Is a Lazy Eye?

A lazy eye, known medically as **amblyopia**, occurs when one eye doesn't develop normal vision during childhood. It happens because that eye wasn't being used properly—the brain starts to “ignore” the vision from it, and relies completely on the stronger eye.

A lazy eye may develop:

Because of a squint (the brain ‘turns off’ the image from the ‘squinting’ eye to avoid double vision).

Due to unequal images from the two eyes (one eye needs a stronger prescription than the other, and the image ‘output’ is more blurry).

Less commonly, due to obstructions like a droopy eyelid or cataract.

If untreated, the weaker eye may never develop normal vision, even if it looks straight later. There is a limit to the age when treatment is effective: up to 9 years of age.

Signs and Symptoms

Children don't always realize when one eye isn't working properly, so parents and teachers often notice first.

Look for:

- Eyes that don't look in the same direction
- Frequent squinting, head tilting, or closing one eye
- Difficulty judging distances
- Complaints of double vision
- Poor depth perception
- Trouble reading or focusing on close tasks

Because early treatment is most effective, any sign of a squint or lazy eye should be checked right away.

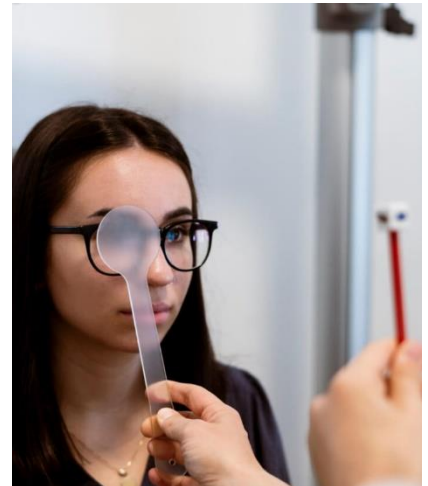


How Are They Diagnosed?

An eye exam is simple and painless.

The eye doctor will:

- Check how well each eye sees
- Assess how the eyes move and work together
- Look for differences in prescription strength
- Examine the health of the eyes inside and out



For young children, special tests and fun tools like pictures or lights are used to keep them comfortable and engaged.

How Are They Treated?

Treatment depends on the cause, but the goal is always to help both eyes work comfortably together and develop normal vision.

Glasses: If one eye has a stronger prescription or a child is very long-sighted, glasses can balance and relax the focus which helps straighten the eyes.

Patching: When one eye is weaker, a patch may be worn over the stronger eye for several hours a day. This forces the brain to use and strengthen the weaker eye.

Eye Drops: In some cases, special drops are used to blur the stronger eye temporarily, encouraging use of the weaker eye instead of wearing a patch.

Vision Therapy or Exercises: Eye and reflex training can be done with a professional VT practitioner, or exercises may be prescribed to improve coordination between the eyes.

Surgery: If muscle imbalance is the main cause, eye muscle surgery can help align the eyes. This is usually a quick procedure and often done in children when other treatments aren't effective.



Early Detection Is Key

Treatment works best when started early—ideally before age seven—because the visual system is still developing.

However, older children and adults can also benefit from treatment, especially for alignment and comfort.

In Summary

A **squint** means the eyes don't point in the same direction, while a **lazy eye** means one eye doesn't develop normal vision.

Both are treatable, especially when found early. Regular eye exams for children—starting before school age—are the best way to catch these problems early and keep vision healthy for life. With early care, most children with squint or lazy eye go on to develop normal, comfortable vision and excellent depth perception.