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Protect those peepers

Why eye health should be a priority from day one

They're one of the smallest organs we have but also one of the most vital that we should protect. That is why this National Eye Health Week (September 23-29), Specsavers, together with actress Sophie Thompson, are urging parents not to neglect their children's eye health.

Our eyes are what makes learning so great. In children's early years, their eyes are how they discover new things and learn about their surroundings. 80% of what is taught at school is presented visually¹ and recent reports also state that 65% of the population are visual learners² and need to see pictures and graphs to visualise.

Sophie says: 'When children are little it's often difficult to know if they can't see properly, especially if they can't communicate fully yet. That's why I was shocked when I discovered one of my sons needed glasses and so relieved that his optician was able to spot the signs and help. Making sure they had regular eye tests became a top priority as it's the best way for them to learn and take in the world around them.'

Typically, children's eyes will be checked within 72 hours of birth to detect any immediate problems. When they get slightly older, it's important to be aware of any issues children may have as they may not be able to verbalise this yet.

¹ https://www.specsavers.co.uk/childrens-eyecare?gclid=Cj0KCQjwv8nqBRDGARIsAHfR9wBo0_h15mZ4ddQVu7Ne0mgDEPoFEC3X5iSXNMnIEMF-xy4jseIn-cgaAqQNEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds

² <https://www.inc.com/molly-reynolds/how-to-spot-visual-auditory-and-kinesthetic-learni.html>

Opticians use specially designed charts that allow children to recognise shapes or pictures, or even to match letters, rather than the traditional charts that you may be familiar with. This means their eyes can be tested, even if they are unable to read.

Specsavers clinical spokesperson Dr Nigel Best says: 'Clear sight is incredibly important in children's early development so it's vital that eye health is a priority. For young children, giving them visually stimulating toys such as puzzles, pegboards finger paints can help aid their visual development.'

One way to ensure children's eyes are fully protected is to ensure they wear their shades when the sun comes out. We all know that it's important to protect our skin from Ultraviolet (UV) rays and it's exactly the same for our eyes.

Dr Nigel Best says: 'While many people understand the damage UV rays can cause to skin, fewer appreciate the damage they can cause to your eyes. Prolonged exposure of your eyes to UV has been linked to cataracts, macular degeneration and even some types of eye cancer.'

It's essential that children are wearing their sunglasses during all time spent outside and that includes play time at school. Even on cloudy days, our eyes can be exposed to UV radiation, so sunglasses should be as important as packing their lunch or homework.

Your eyes can reveal a lot about your general health and so it's really important for both children and adults to have regular eye tests – once every two years, or more often if recommended by your optometrist to ensure we don't lose the picture. To book your next appointment or discover the range of sunglasses on offer head to your nearest Specsavers store or visit www.specsavers.co.uk

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