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Media Release (AUS)

Dyslexia Week 4-10 October 2021

It's not in the eyes

This Dyslexia Week, RANZCO & the ADA are demystifying dyslexia to ensure children get the correct support in a timely manner.

RANZCO and the Australian Dyslexia Association (ADA) want parents and teachers to be on the lookout for the signs of dyslexia. There are many misconceptions about the cause and treatment of this learning disorder. Timely diagnosis and the correct treatment are key.

Dyslexia is an impairment of reading that can affect anyone. Importantly, dyslexia is not a vision problem. Dyslexia is not the result of problems with someone's eyes or vision or ability to focus and track words and letters across a page. Dyslexia cannot be treated or managed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist using eye exercises or glasses.

Dyslexia is a language processing disorder. It is often, but not always, accompanied by a history of language delay or speech therapy.

Paediatric Ophthalmologist, Dr Maree Flaherty, notes that "the reversal of letters, numbers and words are not a sign of dyslexia, and do not occur with increased frequency in dyslexia".

RANZCO and the ADA are working to improve understanding of dyslexia, which is the most common of the specific learning disorders that affect between 5 and 15% of Australian school-aged children. Dyslexia does not go away as children get older and will continue into adulthood. However, through intervention and regular appropriate support it can be managed.

What to look for?

Parents and teachers should be on the lookout for children who seem to be having difficulty learning to read despite normal intelligence and adequate educational opportunity.

What to do if you think a child may have dyslexia?

Dr Flaherty suggested a two-step approach:

1. Check it out – rule it out.

Book an appointment for a "comprehensive eye exam" with an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. This will identify or rule out any underlying problems such as an eye disorder, need for glasses or rarely a more serious medical cause. An optometrist may choose to refer on to a Paediatric Ophthalmologist for a more comprehensive opinion.

2. Appropriate management.

If the eye exam uncovers no refractive error or eye disease, parents should seek a referral to an Educational Psychologist to formally assess for dyslexia.

The evidence-based treatment for dyslexia is an individualised remedial reading program comprising intensive instruction in the language areas, particularly of phonics and phoneme awareness. Dr Flaherty notes that "scientific evidence does not support the use of treatments like vision therapy, tinted lenses or colour filters for the treatment of dyslexia".

"If you or your child's teacher have concerns, book in for an eye exam or visit the [Australian Dyslexia Association](https://dyslexiaassociation.org.au/) (<https://dyslexiaassociation.org.au/>) for more information. Importantly, it has been shown that the earlier the intervention the greater the improvement."

RANZCO is The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists. We train eye specialists for Australia and New Zealand and advocate for equitable and sustainable eye care for all.

An ophthalmologist is a medically-trained doctor who has specialised in disorders of vision and of the eyes. They perform eye examinations, eye laser treatment and eye operations. Eye doctors who specialise in children's eyes and vision are called paediatric ophthalmologists. You will usually need a referral from a GP or optometrist to see an ophthalmologist. You can find an ophthalmologist in your area through the [RANZCO website \(www.ranzco.edu\)](http://www.ranzco.edu).

The ADA is the Australian Dyslexia Association. We are concerned with the well being, identification and treatment of those with dyslexia and related differences and challenges.

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