

PRESS RELEASE
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Send them outside!
Myopia on the rise – what parents need to know.

This Myopia Awareness Week, RANZCO is educating parents on ways to prevent myopia in their children and what to look out for so it can be caught early and managed effectively.

What is myopia?

Myopia, or short sightedness, is an epidemic with increasing prevalence in Australia and worldwide.

Myopia occurs when the eye grows more than usual and light can no longer reach its proper focal point at the back of the eye, making it hard to see things that are far away. If left untreated, myopia can interfere with school performance. Approximately 10% of children develop severe myopia, which increases their risk of developing blinding eye complications.

Myopia in children is a serious concern for parents and the community in general. It is on the rise and children are developing it earlier than ever before.

Early intervention can reduce the progression of myopia and decrease the likelihood of children developing the blinding complications of severe myopia. This has a huge impact on their quality of life, as well as on future cost of treatment.

What are some ways to minimize the likelihood of children developing myopia?

Children should spend Sun-Safe time outdoors, following the slip, slop, slap, SLIDE, and seek shade steps.

Exposure to the brightness of sunlight is important to reduce the development and progression of myopia. However, as UV radiation is damaging to the eyes, children need to do it in a Sun-Safe manner.

If children are not spending time outdoors, it is more likely they will develop myopia. It is recommended that children spend at least 2–3 sun protected hours outdoors, per day.

Outdoor time also affords children time away from close range reading, with evidence suggesting prolonged study times indoors without eye breaks can be a contributing factor to myopia.

If a child already has myopia, glasses are important in slowing its progression.

What are the signs?

If parents or teachers notice children struggling to see the front of the class, if they squint to see images in the distance, or bring books or devices closer to read them, it is recommended they get an eye check.

Children themselves may not always report that it is difficult to see in the distance, and so it is important they undergo an eye examination when they are 4 years of age to screen for myopia and other eye disorders.

What should parents do if they see the signs of myopia?

A vision check with a general practitioner, optometrist, school screening team, orthoptist or ophthalmologist can determine if myopia is present.

Ophthalmologists work closely with optometrists and orthoptists to monitor and manage myopia. This is especially important if children have severe myopia, which can be associated with a range of other eye diseases and is important to exclude other conditions like keratoconus, which can mimic myopia.

How is myopia managed?

Glasses are the most common tool for managing myopia, allowing images in the distance to become focused.

Drops can be prescribed to slow myopia progression and reduce the risk of developing severe myopia and its blinding complications later in life.

In adulthood myopia can be managed using contact lenses, refractive laser surgery, implantable contact lenses and lens exchange surgery, especially for people who have distortions from their glasses or want to undertake activities not conducive to wearing glasses.

Is anyone else at risk?

Developing myopia is not confined to children, and it is possible for adults to develop it later in life. The minimization strategies, signs and steps to management remain the same. It is more common in families with myopia, but with increasing prevalence we all can be affected and need to be aware.

RANZCO's [RANZCO Position statement – Progressive Myopia in Childhood](#) delves further into myopia, providing a scientific review of myopia, its causes and management.

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The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) is the medical college responsible for the training and professional development of ophthalmologists in Australia and New Zealand. Our mission is to drive improvements in eye healthcare in Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region through continuing exceptional training, education, research and advocacy.

Myopia Awareness Week

23-28 MAY 2022

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