Getting your kids' eyes tested: NetWellness

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By Special to The Plain Dealer

For many, the first day of school is quickly approaching, and parents know there is so much to be done to make sure their child has all of the tools to succeed.

A key part of this success starts with healthy eyesight in the classroom. Did you know that about 80 percent of learning in a child's first 12 years comes through the eyes?

So before school starts this year, make sure your child takes the test that may help them pass all the rest. Have your child's eyes and vision examined by an eye care professional (optometrist or ophthalmologist).

Kids often compensate for poor vision

Often, children do not realize they have problems with their vision because they think how they see is how everyone else sees. They learn to compensate with their vision problems without fixing them, which can lead to more problems in school and later in life.
Unfortunately, some students are misdiagnosed as having a learning disability or behavioral problems when they may have vision impairment. This confusion can be addressed by taking a child for a certified vision screening or an eye exam.

**Common vision problems**

Vision problems affect one in four school-aged children. A child should not have to struggle in school because of an undetected vision problem.

Eye problems can range from common refractive errors such as nearsightedness and farsightedness, to serious eye conditions, including amblyopia or "lazy eye" -- the most common cause of visual impairment in children. As the brain develops and receives diminished images from the affected eye, it begins to suppress those images and favor the unaffected eye. If this condition persists, the weaker eye may become useless.

Amblyopia becomes more difficult to treat effectively as the child becomes older.

Strabismus, or "crossed eyes," is a condition where eyes are misaligned, or do not line up with each other. This problem is caused when the muscles do not work together. Strabismus may eventually lead to amblyopia. About one in 50 children has strabismus.

Eye problems like amblyopia or strabismus are most successfully treated before age 6. If left until the child is older, the child may have good vision in only one eye for the remainder of their lifetime. That is why a continuum of eye care throughout the lifespan beginning at birth and including regular vision screenings and comprehensive eye exams is so important.

**What you can do**

Now is the time for parents to hit the books as well to learn more about how to ensure healthy eyesight for their kids. Make sure your child's eye problems do not go unnoticed this school year.

*This article is based on information provided by Prevent Blindness Ohio and was adapted for use on NetWellness with permission.*