

Vision therapy

Vision therapy is a program that aims to improve a person's visual abilities. It uses a variety of means - such as eye exercises, testing, occlusion (patching) lenses and prisms - to treat a range of visual problems. Vision therapy may be used to treat problems such as amblyopia (lazy eye), eye alignment and coordination problems (including turned eyes or squints), poor focus or inadequate eye-hand coordination. Each program is designed to suit the specific needs of the individual.

How vision works

Vision is the process of deriving meaning from what is seen. It is more than simply the ability to distinguish fine details (visual acuity). Vision also involves:

- accommodation (focusing)
- convergence (eye aiming)
- binocularity (eye coordination)
- fixation and eye movement abilities
- eye-hand coordination
- visual form perception.

Vision continues to develop after birth and is influenced by the visual environment and the individual's experience. Vision problems can exist despite having healthy eyes and seeing clearly, as difficulties can occur in eye muscle control and coordination. People with vision problems may experience visual discomfort when performing visually demanding activities.

Vision therapy treatment

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, approximately half the Australian population has some vision problem that requires treatment. While the majority have refractive errors (short-sightedness, long-sightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia), in some instances, problems can be improved by vision therapy.

Vision therapy can be undertaken by people of all ages, but its effect is greatest in children and young adults. For example, many children have difficulty coordinating their two eyes. To see something clearly, both eyes must be aimed correctly and focused at the right distance. Any problems with aiming or focusing the eyes can cause a variety of symptoms, including intermittent double vision, blurred vision, headaches and feelings of eyestrain.

Children with these problems often do not complain about them, but may simply avoid tasks, such as reading, which are difficult or cause discomfort. An optometrist may suggest a program of vision therapy to improve eye coordination and focusing.

The vision therapy program

Vision therapy or visual training is specifically designed by an optometrist to meet individual needs. Diagnostic testing, training procedures or exercises, and the use of lenses and prisms may be integral components of the successful treatment of a vision problem. The frequency of consultation, the amount of home training and the duration of the therapy will depend on the nature and severity of the problem being treated and the needs of the person.

Vision therapy is typically used to improve the coordination and control of eye movements.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your optometrist
- Optometrists Association Victoria Tel. (03) 9652 9100

Things to remember

- Not all vision problems can be corrected by spectacles or contact lenses.
- Vision therapy can treat amblyopia (lazy eye), eye alignment problems (turned eye or squint), eye coordination problems, poorly sustained near focus, inadequate eye-hand coordination, and immature perceptual development.
- Each program is designed to suit the specific needs of the individual.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Optometry Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2015 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.