



A beginner's guide to myopia in children

What is myopia?

Myopia is another word for nearsightedness. That's when close-up objects look clear, but ones farther away – like the front of a classroom – look blurry. Myopia is the result of the eye growing faster and longer than it should, becoming weaker along the way. As kids get older, nearsightedness becomes more common.

Here's what you need to know about myopia and how to help your child see better.

Why is childhood myopia increasing?

Myopia is increasing in the United States. The number of nearsighted adults and kids rose from 25% in the early 1970s to nearly 42% just 3 decades later.² “The main reason why we've seen it increase in kids is because they're not spending enough time outdoors in the sunlight,” says Laura Vasilakos, O.D., a developmental optometrist in Hanover, Massachusetts.

Instead, they're spending too much time indoors doing near work on their computers, tablets and cellphones. “The smaller the device, the more problematic it is,” she says. “I'm more concerned about kids spending hours on their cellphones versus just on their computer.”

Genetics can also play a role. When parents have myopia, they may pass it to their children. The chances that a child may develop myopia are 1 in 2 when both parents have myopia, and 1 in 3 when one parent has myopia.³

Will my child outgrow myopia?

Nearsightedness isn't something that goes away. In fact, the younger the child, the faster it may progress – until the eye stops growing, which can be at 16–18 years, and even as late as their early 20s. If left untreated, myopia can increase the risk of vision-threatening conditions later in life, such as glaucoma and cataracts.⁴

Myopia can also affect your child's schoolwork if they aren't able to see things like the smart board at the front of their classroom. Another potential problem? It can cause some of the same symptoms as ADHD, such as trouble sitting still and seeming distracted – which may lead to a misdiagnosis.

“That's why parents need to know the signs of myopia in their kids,” says Vasilakos.



Myopia is becoming more prevalent, currently affecting:¹

5%
of preschoolers

9%
of school-age children

30%
of teens



How do eye doctors treat myopia?

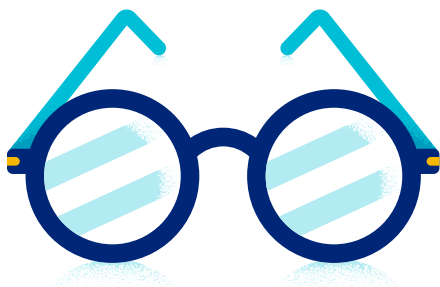
While eye doctors can't cure or reverse myopia, they can prescribe eyeglasses or contact lenses so that your child can see clearly again.

According to Vasilakos, children who develop severe myopia may “have a higher risk of developing eye diseases later in life,” including glaucoma, cataracts and others.⁷

Myopia-management treatment

Here are a few options known to slow the progression of myopia as a child grows.

- 1 Atropine eye drops** – These are the same eye drops that eye doctors use to check vision during an exam. “In low doses they may help slow myopia,” says Vasilakos. In a study, kids between the ages of 4 and 9 who were given these drops every night for 2 years were much less likely to go on to develop myopia.⁸
- 2 Myopia control soft contact lenses (MiSight 1 day)** – These are known as peripheral defocus contact lenses. The center of the lens corrects distance vision so that your child can see. The outer portion redirects light to get the eye growth back on track. When can kids start wearing them? “I’ll consider them in kids as young as 7 or 8, if I think they are mature enough to handle contact lenses,” Vasilakos says.
- 3 Myopia control spectacles (Essilor Stellest lens)** – Recently FDA-authorized, Stellest lenses are the first eyeglass lenses in the U.S. designed to slow myopia progression in children. They use a central correction zone surrounded by lenslets that create peripheral defocus, helping slow the worsening of nearsightedness. Clinical studies show up to 67% slower progression compared to standard lenses.⁹
- 4 Orthokeratology (ortho-K)** – While kids sleep, these firm contact lenses reshape and flatten the central cornea. “They wake up with clear vision,” says Juanita Collier, O.D., an optometrist and owner of 4D Vision Gym in Cromwell, Connecticut. Once your child stops wearing the lens, their cornea gradually goes back to its original shape. While these lenses correct eyesight only temporarily, they have been shown to slow the progression of myopia over time.



Signs your child may be nearsighted:⁵

- Needs to sit at the front of the classroom
- Sits very close to the TV screen
- Squints, rubs their eyes or blinks a lot
- Often complains of headaches
- Holds books very close to their face
- Seem to have a short attention span
- Complains of double vision

Next steps to take:

Set up a comprehensive eye exam with an optometrist right away. Ideally, kids should get exams at these ages:⁶

- 6 months to 2 years
- 3 years
- 5 to 6 years (before starting school)
- Annually throughout their school years

Most kids tend to become nearsighted (or notice it) around third grade, Vasilakos adds.

How to help slow the progression of nearsightedness

While eye doctors can help your child see more clearly, there are things you can do for your child at home that may help prevent or at least slow the onset or progression of myopia.

- ✓ **Limit their screen time.** Kids who spend most of their time on both a smartphone and a computer have an 80% higher risk of developing myopia, according to the American Optometric Association.⁷
- ✓ **Send them outside.** Being outdoors also helps boost vitamin D levels. “Low levels of the sunshine vitamin have been associated with an increased risk of nearsightedness,” Collier says.



How UnitedHealthcare Vision is helping kids see their best

As more children are being diagnosed with myopia, early detection and treatment can make a difference. That's why UnitedHealthcare Vision offers programs and resources to help support children's eye health.

Extra support through our Children's Eye Care Program

Growing eyes can change quickly. That's why UnitedHealthcare Vision plans include enhanced benefits for children up to age 19 at no additional premium cost (standard copays apply to additional exams and eyewear).

Dependent children receive:

- A second eye exam during the year
- A new pair of glasses if their prescription changes by 0.50 diopter or more
- Polycarbonate lenses at no additional cost

Regular eye exams can help detect vision changes early and ensure children have the vision correction they need to learn, play and thrive.

Helping parents learn more about myopia

UnitedHealthcare Vision is a member of the Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC), a group dedicated to raising awareness about childhood myopia and the steps families can take to help protect children's vision.

Parents and caregivers can access educational resources on topics such as:

- Healthy habits that may help slow myopia progression
- The importance of outdoor play and time away from screens
- Understanding childhood myopia and available treatment options

Find available GMAC resources on myopiaawareness.org.

Access to specialized myopia care

Myopia management can be costly, which is why UnitedHealthcare Vision has partnered with Treehouse Eyes to help families save on treatment.

Treehouse Eyes is a national leader in childhood myopia management. Their specialized care helps slow or even stop the progression of myopia, giving kids better vision for life.

What's included:

- No-cost consultations nationwide (virtual and in-office)
- Discounts on treatment at participating Treehouse Eyes locations

Find your nearest Treehouse Eyes location and schedule your child's no-cost consultation today at treehouseeyes.com.



Helping children see clearly today can help protect their vision for tomorrow.

Regular eye exams can help detect myopia early, and healthy habits like spending time outdoors and limiting screen time may help support lifelong eye health.

United Healthcare

This is a discount program and not related to any routine vision benefit.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics. Myopia (Nearsightedness) in Children & Teens. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/eyes/Pages/Myopia-Nearsightedness.aspx>. Accessed Oct 2025. ² JAMA Ophthalmology. Reducing the Progression of Myopia. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2769247>. Accessed Oct 2025. ³ Optician. C52102: Is myopia control the next contact lens revolution? <https://www.opticianonline.net/cpd-archive/127>. Accessed Oct 2025. ⁴ American Academy of Ophthalmology. Nearsightedness: What is Myopia? <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/myopia-nearsightedness>. Accessed Oct 2025. ⁵ American Academy of Ophthalmology. Myopia. <https://eyewiki.aao.org/Myopia>. Accessed Oct 2025. ⁶ American Optometric Association. School-Aged Vision: 6 to 18 Years of Age. <https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-health-for-life/school-aged-vision?sso=y>. Accessed Oct 2025. ⁷ American Optometric Association. Myopia (nearsightedness). <https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions/myopia?sso=y>. Accessed Oct 2025. ⁸ American Optometric Association. Study: Could atropine delay or prevent myopia in children? <https://www.aoa.org/news/clinical-eye-care/public-health/myopia-drops>. Accessed Oct 2025. ⁹ FDA. FDA authorizes marketing of first eyeglass lenses to slow progression of pediatric myopia. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-authorizes-marketing-first-eyeglass-lenses-slow-progression-pediatric-myopia>. Accessed Oct 2025.

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