



Patient Information

Spectacles (Glasses) for Children

This leaflet aims to answer some of the most common questions you may have now that you have been told that your child needs to wear spectacles.

A child requires spectacles when they have a focusing problem that will affect the normal development of their vision. This could be long sightedness (hypermetropia), short sightedness (myopia), irregular shaped eyes (astigmatism) or a different focus between the eyes (anisometropia).

How does the optometrist/ophthalmologist know my child needs spectacles?

Assessing the need for spectacles, known as refraction, can only be done by an optometrist or eye doctor (ophthalmologist).

Eye drops are used to dilate the pupils and to stop the eye from changing focus so that the optometrist/ophthalmologist can measure the strength of spectacles required by your child using a light, known as a retinoscope, and a series of lenses. The test does not rely on what your child tells us they can see.

Where do I get the spectacles?

The optometrist/ophthalmologist will issue a spectacle voucher that states the strength of the spectacles your child needs. The spectacle voucher can be taken to any community optical practice.

Choosing spectacles

A dispensing optician or optical assistant in the optical practice will help you to select a frame that is suitable for your child in relation to their age, facial characteristics and lens strength. It is also important that your child feels involved in the selection process, as it may help with their acceptance of wearing spectacles. The frame needs to be comfortable, safe and sturdy, ideally with flexible hinges. Different optical practices have different ranges of frames available, so you are free to look around several before making a decision.



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Who pays for the spectacles?

Children under the age of 16 (also 16-18 year olds in full time education) are entitled to a Hospital Eye Service (HES) spectacle voucher. The optical practice you choose must provide a basic pair of spectacles, that is a suitable frame and the correct strength lenses in exchange for the voucher. The range of frames available under this arrangement will vary between optical practices. If you wish to choose a frame outside of the basic range you will be expected to pay the cost difference. Additional features such as thinner lenses or coatings (anti-reflection, scratch resistance) are also available at an additional cost.

As per Department of Health guidelines, optometrists/ophthalmologists can only issue a voucher for **one** pair of spectacles after a new refraction (spectacles test) which shows either that a new prescription is required or that the spectacles need to be replaced due to fair wear and tear, except in exceptional circumstances.

What should I do if my child's spectacles need adjusting, break or are lost?

If the spectacles are lost, broken or require adjustment you should return to the optical practice where the spectacles were dispensed. Most repairs or replacements are free of charge for the basic spectacle range. Premium features such as upgraded frames or lens coatings may incur a fee to repair/replace.

Should the spectacles be worn all day?

Most children aged 8 years and younger should wear their spectacles all the time unless advised that they should only be worn for specific activities. This is because the connections between the eyes and the brain are still being formed and consolidated. If a child requires spectacles but does not wear them, then their vision may never develop properly and may result in permanently 'lazy vision' known as amblyopia in one or both eyes. People with 'lazy eyes' may not be able to do many of the things we take for granted such as driving a car or some types of jobs.

Many parents assume that wearing spectacles all the time will make their child reliant on them and cause their vision to become worse without spectacles. This is not true, your child is simply becoming intolerant of the poor vision they have without them.

Should my child wear spectacles during PE lessons or when playing other sports?

It is reasonable for your child to remove their spectacles when playing sports where spectacles may pose a safety risk to themselves or to others. However, children may perform better at sports with their spectacles on due to improved vision and spatial awareness. If this is the case then, where regular spectacles are not appropriate, special sports spectacles or prescription swimming goggles can be purchased from optical practices.



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Can my child have prescription sunglasses?

Tinted spectacle lenses are provided by the Hospital Eye Service (HES) spectacle voucher system if your child requires them for a medical reason. For example those who suffer from disability glare as a result of aniridia or ocular albinism. Aniridia means the iris, which is the coloured part of your eye, is missing or incomplete. Ocular albinism is a genetic condition that primarily affects the eyes. This condition reduces the colouring (pigmentation) of the iris and the retina, which is the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye making it more sensitive to bright light.

A tinted lens voucher covers a basic fixed tint. Photochromic lenses (lenses that darken and lighten according to light conditions) may be supplied by your optical practice if appropriate. However, an extra charge will be payable. For all other children, prescription sunglasses can be purchased at an additional cost from your optical practice. Remember that photochromic lenses will darken even inside a classroom and can make it more difficult for your child to see their school work. Some schools will not allow photochromic lenses in the classroom.

Alternatively encourage your child to wear a peaked sun hat which will offer good protection from the sun and is far less expensive.

Will my child always wear spectacles?

This depends on the strength of the spectacles, the age of the child and whether there is also a squint (inward or outward turning of one eye). The aim of spectacles wear is that their vision develops to a normal level, rather than to remove the need to wear spectacles. The orthoptist, optometrist or ophthalmologist will discuss the long-term need for spectacles with you.

Are contact lenses a suitable alternative to spectacles?

Contact lenses are a viable alternative to spectacles to correct a child's vision. If spectacles help to improve the appearance of a squint, then contact lenses will also work in just the same way. There is no minimum age for contact lens wear but the ability of the child to understand the importance of hygiene and eye health is paramount when considering fitting contact lenses to a child. Your child would still need a pair of spectacles for days when the contact lenses are not being worn.

Contact lenses are only available under the Hospital Eye Service in circumstances where the vision cannot be improved to a normal level with spectacles alone or where there is a therapeutic requirement. For example where it is painful or there is a cosmetically unsightly eye. Therefore in the majority of cases you would have to have contact lenses fitted privately in a community optical practice. You can ask our optometrist or ophthalmologist for advice when your child has their spectacles test.



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How often will the spectacles be changed?

Your child will normally have a refraction (spectacles test) once a year unless there is a clinical indication to do this at a more frequent interval.

Are the spectacles too strong?

If you do not wear spectacles or your prescription is different, your child's spectacles may appear to be very strong. The refraction test provides an accurate measurement of the strength of lenses your child requires.

How can I keep the spectacles on my child?

Don't make a huge fuss about the spectacles. Be very positive about the spectacles and your child's appearance with the spectacles on. Casually point out other children and adults that wear spectacles and comment on how nice they look. Ensure all your family and friends are positive about the spectacles.

If your child is a baby or toddler, try to distract them as soon as you put the spectacles on them. If your child removes them, replace them. If the child continues to remove them, put them aside for a while and try again later. Do not allow it to become a battle between you.

It takes time for children to adjust to their spectacles and correct the focusing problem. Persevere with the spectacles as much as possible. If they will not wear the spectacles after 2 weeks, contact the Orthoptist/Optomtrist for advice on the telephone number below.

Please bring your child's spectacles with you to any follow up appointments.

Contact us

Orthoptic & Optical Department,
Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust,
Swindon.
SN3 6BB

Telephone/answerphone: 01793 604702

Weekdays 8am – 5pm

Useful websites:

www.eyesite.nhs.uk

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/conditions/lazyeye



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Smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

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