

Nystagnus is an involuntary beating (wobbling) movement of either one or both eyes. The eyes may 'wobble' from side to side, up and down or rotate slightly. There are different types of nystagnus which have different causes.

It is usually non progressive (doesn't get worse). However, it is usually a lifelong condition

There are a number of causes of nystagnus. These can be divided into two groups:

Sensory deprivation (an obstruction to vision leading to reduced vision)

Idiopathic (no clear cause)

The commonest cause of nystagnus is albinism (when the gene for making melanin is faulty). Nystagnus is also quite often linked to having a squint

Nystagnus in early childhood doesn't usually cause any symptoms.

Older children may notice that their vision isn't as clear as it could be.

Adults and older children who develop nystagnus may get oscillopsia - this is when objects that are stationary appear to move side to side or shimmer.

You may notice that your child's nystagnus looks more noticeable if they have to wear an eye patch. Do not worry, this is temporary and will not make their nystagnus worse.

You may notice your child's nystagnus looks more noticeable if they are unwell or overtired and their vision may also become more blurred.

Nystagmus can be diagnosed by an Ophthalmologist or an Orthoptist, by observing your child's eyes as part of his/her eye examination

Your child may be referred for eye movement recording to determine the exact type of nystagmus they have. He or she may also be referred to the paediatrician

There is currently no specific treatment for nystagmus, however, if your child needs glasses then regular glasses updates can help improve their vision

Contact lenses may also help to reduce the wobble of your child's eyes. However, these can only be considered once your child is old enough to put contact lenses in by themselves.

Vision is usually affected by nystagmus. The amount that vision can be affected varies widely from person to person. Some children may have good vision whilst others may have quite reduced vision

In some cases glasses are required. If this is the case, they can help to improve the vision

Children's vision develops from birth to 8 years of age

If your child has nystagmus, it is likely that we will offer regular orthoptic appointments to monitor their vision until your child is 7 or 8 years old. In addition to this, your child will be offered a glasses test every 12 months, unless the clinician requests you have this done sooner.

If your child's vision is significantly reduced by nystagmus, they may be suitable for sight impairment registration

If your child's vision is significantly affected by nystagmus, it may be helpful for your child and their teacher to have support at school/nursery to understand the condition and its implications in the classroom. This support can be provided by the visual impairment/ROMIC (rehabilitation officers for visually impaired children) team

If you would like any further information, please contact the orthoptic department on 01271322469

The Nystagmus Network – provides useful advice and support and can be accessed online at: <http://nystagmusnetwork.org/>

The RNB is another organisation that can offer support and advice, and can be accessed at <http://www.rnb.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions-z-eye-conditions/nystagmus>