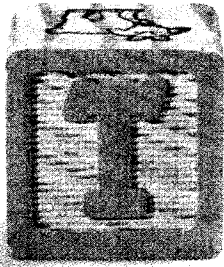


# house call

advice from the american academy of pediatrics



## jeepers peepers!



Take care of those baby blues or browns or greens—each year thousands of children needlessly suffer from eye problems because they haven't been screened. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all babies

have an eye exam performed by their pediatrician soon after birth and at each well-child visit. This way, problems such as cataracts, tumors, muscle disorders, and amblyopia (also known as "lazy eye") can be detected early, while they're still treatable. Here's what you can do:

• **Have your baby screened.** Be sure that your pediatrician examines your baby's eyes. She'll likely use a tool called an ophthalmoscope and a penlight to detect problems that may require a referral to a specialist. Some doctors are also using a new technique called photo-screening to make eye tests easier: A camera takes a photo of the baby's pupil, which can then be analyzed.

### Keep an eye out for these vision milestones:

**1 month:** Your baby can focus on anything within his 12-inch range of sight and detect bold patterns.

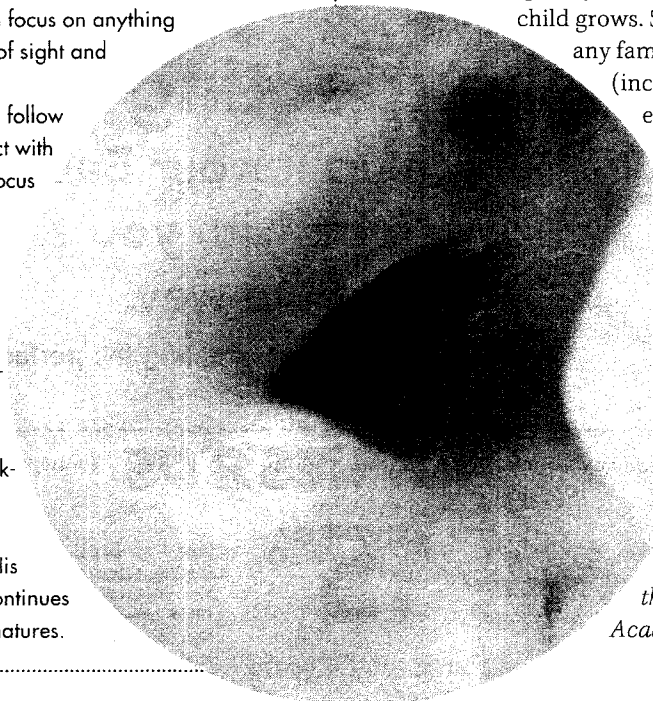
**2 months:** He'll begin to follow or "track" a moving object with his eyes, which can now focus at the same time.

**3 months:** Your baby gains depth perception and distance vision.

**4 months:** Color vision develops; this means your baby will like complex patterns and shapes.

**5 months:** He'll love looking at his reflection and objects in a mirror.

**6 months and older:** His hand-eye coordination continues to develop as his vision matures.



• **Follow through on referrals.** It's important to take your baby to a specialist if your pediatrician recommends it. While most eye problems can be treated, early detection is crucial. Strabismus (misaligned eyes), for example, is a common problem in which one eye gazes straight ahead while the other turns in another direction. Affected babies often shut off the vision in the "turned" eye to avoid having double vision. Some forms of strabismus can be corrected with eyeglasses, while others require surgery. Untreated, the condition can lead to amblyopia, loss of depth perception, or, eventually, a permanent loss of vision.

• **Watch for warning signs.** Let your pediatrician know if you spot any of the following: Your baby can't make steady eye contact by 2 or 3 months of age or seems unable to see; your baby is over 3 months old and doesn't follow or "track" an object with his eyes as it moves across his field of vision; there's a constant crossing of his eyes, or one eye turns out. (Most babies, however, will occasionally cross their eyes during their first 6 months.) Other red flags: Your baby's eyes flutter quickly; are very watery, red, or sensitive to light; have droopy lids; or have a white material in the pupil.

• **Stay on schedule.** Continue to have your baby's eyes examined regularly, since problems can develop as a child grows. Share your observations and any family history of eye disorders (including wearing glasses at an early age) with your baby's doctor. Formal eye tests (measuring what your child really sees) should begin at age 3. Vision is vital to your child's development; screening can help keep her on track. To learn more about eye health, visit the "Parenting Corner" on the AAP's website, AAP.org.

*Carol Berkowitz, M.D., is the president of the American Academy of Pediatrics.*