

damage the child's sight.

- If you suspect an **ulcer**, explain that parents must put the eye drops in every 30 minutes until they reach the hospital. They must be urged to go immediately – **no delay**. Explain that it is important to find out the exact cause of the ulcer so that it can be treated properly; the antibiotic eye drops are just an emergency treatment.
- Suspected **viral, bacterial, allergic, and vernal conjunctivitis**: Tell parents that the infection should get better, but that you want to see the child again in a few

days to make sure there is improvement. Even if the eye or eyes get better quickly, parents should still bring the child back so you can see them again, because there may be incomplete healing or there may be some damage that still needs treatment.

- Whatever the cause of the redness or discharge, tell parents to avoid using traditional remedies or seeking the advice of a traditional healer.
- Explain that it is really important to instil eye drops as often as instructed, and in the correct way.

- In case of a suspected penetrating injury, explain that an ophthalmologist needs to see the child urgently and parents should continue with the antibiotics until the child is seen.
- In case of a blunt injury, parents should come back if the eye does not settle within a few days of the injury. The child may need a referral.

How to see the red reflex

The red reflex test can reveal problems in the cornea, lens, and sometimes the vitreous. It can alert you to large lesions in the retina but it cannot be used to identify causes of poor vision related to retinal or optic nerve damage, such as retinal dystrophy or optic nerve hypoplasia.

- The red reflex is much easier to see in a darkened room, so switch off the lights, draw the curtains or ask the parents to accompany you into a room which doesn't have a window.
- Use a direct ophthalmoscope or a red reflex scope (both of these devices allow you to look directly down the light beam) and make sure the batteries are well charged!
- Stand between one and two feet away (around one third to two thirds of a metre) and direct the light to one eye at a time: you should see a bright red reflex from the pupil.
- Sometimes the reflex is more pink than red. This is when the light beam is directed towards the optic disc which is normally pink, not red like the retina (see Figure 24). It is useful to practice looking for the pink reflex. With a co-operative patient, ask them to look slightly away from the light, for example at one of your ears (your left ear if you're examining their left eye, and your right ear if you're examining their right eye). Move nearer and further away until you can spot the pink reflex.



Figure 24. A normal red reflex (right eye) and a normal pink reflex (left eye)

Implications beyond the clinic

If a child presents with trachoma, it is almost certain that other children and adults living in the same village or community will also have trachoma. Unless the whole community is treated, the child will be re-infected. Record the community the child is from and alert the people responsible for trachoma control in your district.

Conclusion

You can have a significant impact on reducing visual loss and blindness in children by examining and referring them. Remember, one of your most powerful tools is your good communication with the parents. By helping parents to understand the importance of a referral and supporting them to take up that referral quickly, you can improve the chances of a good visual outcome for their child.

Even if you suspect that there's nothing that can be done to help the eye or vision, there is still a lot you can do to help the child and parents. In addition to referring the child to an ophthalmologist, make sure the family receives all the other services it may need, including support for the parents and low vision care, rehabilitation, and visual stimulation for the child.

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USEFUL RESOURCES

Useful resources: when your eye patient is a young child

Strabismus

Visit www.cybersight.org to learn more about strabismus or get advice on managing the condition.

Child-friendly care

The Child-Friendly Health Care Initiative (www.cfhiuk.org) has produced a practical manual on child-friendly health care. Download it free at www.cfhiuk.org/publications/cfhi_manual.htm

Equipment for children

Standard list for a VISION 2020 eye care service unit

Download free from www.v2020.org. For a print version, please send your name, occupation, and address to TALC. Cost is UK £3 plus post and packing (free to low- and middle-income countries).

ICEE Global Resource Centre

For reasonably priced spectacle frames and small-diameter, high-power intraocular lenses. Write to ICEE Global Resource Centre, 272 Umbilo Road, Durban, South Africa, call +27 31 202-3811, or visit www.iceegr.org

Books

Helping children who are blind (Hesperian Foundation). Available in English and Spanish. Available from TALC. UK £9.50 plus post and packing or download (free) from www.hesperian.org

Sonksen P and Stiff B. Show me what my friends can see. A developmental guide for parents of babies with severely impaired sight and their professional advisors. Available from the Institute for Child Health, London. Non-UK applications should be sent in writing to: 'Developmental Guide', The Wolfson Centre, Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2AP, UK, or by fax to: + 44 207 833 9469.

Suresh K. Pandey, M. Edward Wilson, Rupal Trivedi. Pediatric cataract surgery: techniques, complications, and management. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2005. UK £99. Available from Waterstones: 71-74 North Street, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 1ZA, UK. Email: manager@brighton.waterstones.co.uk

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The visually impaired child. Volume 20, Issue 62, 2007.

Assessing and managing eye injuries. Volume 18, Issue 55, 2005.

Childhood cataract: magnitude, management, economics and impact. Volume 17, Issue 50, 2004.

Red eye: the role of primary care. Volume 18, Issue 53, 2005;18(53).

Suppliers

Teaching Aids at Low Cost (TALC): PO Box 49, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL1 5TX, UK. Email: info@talcuk.org Website: www.talcuk.org/featured-publishers.htm

International Centre for Eye Health (ICEH): London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT, UK. Email admin@cehjournal.org Website: www.iceh.org.uk