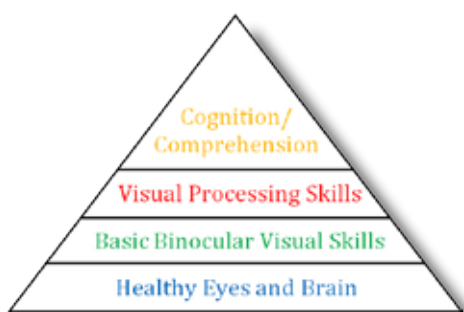


Summer Activities for Improving Visual Skills

By Dr. Christine O. Danley

As summer activities begin, you will have a brief reprieve from academics. Now is a great time to work on visual skills that will improve your child's school performance in the fall! Sports, games and puzzles provide great opportunities for your child to practice the visual skills necessary for reading and learning. Below is a list of indoor and outdoor summer activities that can help, but let's first review the visual skills necessary for learning.



The Visual Skills Pyramid

Just as our digestive organs combine to give us a digestive system, we also have a visual system. I find it easiest to explain our visual system with a pyramid which has healthy eyes and brain at the foundation. Each level of the pyramid builds upon the other.

A person needs to have healthy eyes and a healthy brain in order to be able to use their eyes and visual system adequately. Next, we have two eyes and they need to work together in unison; this is called Basic Binocular Visual Skills. This includes how the eyes move during reading, how they work together as a team, and how they focus.

Visual processing is how the brain interprets the visual information obtained through the eyes by the binocular visual skills. The ultimate output of all of this is comprehension and cognition, the top of the pyramid.

Activities to for Each Level of the

Pyramid

1. Healthy eyes and brain
A good diet is the best way to strengthen the base of the pyramid. Reduce processed foods and introduce more whole foods into your child's diet. Pasture-fed butter will supply important fats your child needs during development. Grass-fed beef and free-range eggs are most-desired sources of protein. Include organic fruits and vegetables for important vitamins and minerals. Finally, high quality cod liver oil will supply essential vitamins A and D. For more information, visit the Nutrition page at www.startreadingsuccess.com.

2. Binocular visual skills
Good tracking skills can be developed through ball games. Soccer, baseball, basketball, football and tennis all encourage good coordination and development of binocular visual skills. Ping-pong can be played indoors and also works the same set of skills. Use larger balls and targets until your child can succeed, and then move to smaller balls.

If balls are too difficult for your child, you can use balloons instead. See how many times he can tap the balloon without letting it hit the ground. Encourage use of both hands for this activity. You may also blow bubbles and have your child poke individual bubbles with his fingers (don't forget to alternate hands!).

Learn how to juggle! Start with two lightweight scarves. Beanbags are also good objects to juggle. Encourage your child to keep his head still while he is learning to juggle, only moving his eyes and his hands as necessary.

On a rainy day, jewelry-making and needlework can encourage good eye-teaming and eye-hand coordination. Mazes can be done with a pencil, with your child's finger, or with his eyes only.

3. Visual processing skills
Rainy days are also perfect for working on visual processing skills. Stock up on hidden picture books, puzzles, and word search books. A great thinking/

strategy game called Rush Hour can be found in most toy stores in both regular and junior editions. Other helpful board games include chess, checkers, Memory, Connect 4, MasterMind, and BattleShip.

There are also numerous computer games on the market which function in essentially the same way as the board games. However, I recommend that screen activities be limited to no more than 30 minutes each day to encourage good visual development.

4. General recommendations
Allow your child the freedom to play on swings, monkey bars and trampolines. Swimming is good exercise and also improves bilateral coordination, which will help with eye teaming. Use imaginative play to encourage visualization. Above all, have fun!

As you and your child enjoy this summer, you will also have an opportunity to watch for signs of vision problems that could interfere with school performance in the fall. Since 80% of learning is dependent upon vision, it is critical that parents and educators ensure they understand the signs and symptoms of vision problems that interfere with learning.

Is your child less than enthusiastic about playing certain sports, especially those that involve catching or hitting balls and shooting baskets? Does he have difficulty with or avoid games that encourage visualization, visual memory, or sustained visual attention? These may all be clues that your child may have a vision problem.

The good news is, once a vision problem is detected, it is usually 100% correctable. If you suspect that your child may have a learning-related vision problem, the summer is also a good time for a developmental vision evaluation. For more information, please visit: www.startreadingsuccess.com.