

Sports Performance & Eye Safety

By Dr. Christina Danley

Shortly after school begins fall sports go into full swing. Unfortunately, sometimes, children and sports don't go together as naturally as one might like.

Here are some telltale signs that your child may have a vision problem that may interfere with sport performance:

Your child...

- seems less enthusiastic about participating in sports, even though he or she enjoyed it at a younger age.
- has difficulties with sports that involve catching or hitting balls or shooting baskets?
- has an inability to see the ball clearly
- has difficulty knowing where the ball or other players are at all times.
- is over or under-estimating the distance of the ball, players or boundaries.
- is a great athlete but can't do ball sports.
- has not improved with practice, often gets worse with more practice.
- Having trouble remembering plays.

If your child is experiencing an undetected vision problem on the basketball court, he could be having trouble in the classroom. Since 80% of learning is tied in intimately with vision, it is imperative that parents and educators alike understand this critical link between vision and learning.

The same vision problem that can prevent full learning in the classroom is the same vision problem that can hamper your child's ability with certain sports. Larry Fitzgerald, All-Pro Arizona Cardinals wide receiver, credits vision therapy for having helped him not only in sports but also in schoolwork.

Children can have 'perfect' or 20/20 vision, yet struggle to see words on a page or a baseball coming at him. The speed and accuracy required for sports demands that you are seeing objects clearly, that you can follow the ball as it flies through space and know where to stand so you can hit it with your bat, and that you need to be able to do this for the entire game.

There are 17 visual skills needed in sports and learning and the eye chart exams is only one of the skills.

The variety of visual skills needed for sports performance are:

Dynamic Visual Acuity – the ability to see objects clearly while in motion

Eye Tracking – the ability to “keep your eyes on the ball,” no matter how fast it may be traveling

Eye Focusing – changing focus quickly and accurately from one distance to another

Peripheral Vision – seeing people and objects “out of the corner of your eye” while concentrating on a fixed point

Fusion Flexibility and Stamina – the ability to keep both eyes working together even under high speed and physically stressful situations.

Depth Perception – quickly and accurately judging the distance and speed of objects.

When your child is missing any of the above visual skills, sports performance will be inconsistent and can even get worse the more he practices.

No matter what type of sports your child is involved in, there is always a risk of an eye injury. If your child wears glasses or contact lenses, the risk is greater. Dress glasses will not protect your child's eyes if a ball or bat hits them in the face. Sports goggles should be worn for protection. These goggles are separate and distinct from everyday eyeglasses because of the protective design and standards.

Over 100,000 sport eye injuries are reported every year and often result in permanent damage, of which 90% of them could have been prevented. Be smart and protect your loved ones with protective eye goggles. Most styles can be made with your child's prescription.

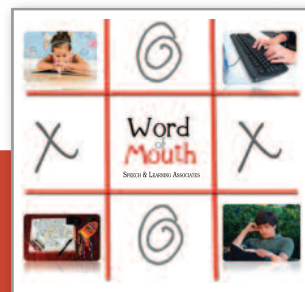
For more information on a developmental evaluation and sports goggles contact a local optometrist.

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