

Eye Patching Tips

Please patch your child's right / left eye for _____ hours per day, every day until the date of the next scheduled appointment.

Introduction:

This handout is meant to assist parents when the doctor has recommended patching their child's eye. Patching is most often used when a child has decreased vision in one eye (the medical term is *amblyopia*). Patching is usually very effective at improving vision in the eye that does not see as well. The patch is applied each day to the eye that sees better. The weaker eye is not patched. Patching works by encouraging the "vision center" in the brain to pay more attention to the vision of the weaker eye and strengthen the connections to the "vision center" in the brain. This often improves the vision in the weaker eye. The child's progress needs to be monitored by the eye doctor.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

What kind of patch should I use?

We prefer that you use adhesive eye patches that stick to the skin around the eye. They are sold in optical shops, pharmacies, and on the internet, as well. They are sold in boxes of 20 patches, and you should use a new patch each day. There is a "junior" size patch for younger children and a "regular" size patch for older children. For children who wear eyeglasses, the patch should be applied to the skin and then the eyeglasses should be put on, over the patch.

There are also non adhesive patches that do not stick to the skin, but if the child removes the patch or peeks around it, the treatment may take longer or may be unsuccessful. There are several kinds of cloth patches that fit over one side of a child's eyeglasses to cover the eye; these are available in some optical shops and on the Internet. Another option is black eye patches with straps that go around the head, but these should not be used for infants or young children because of concerns for the child's safety.

How long does the patch stay on?

The doctor will explain how many hours your child's eye should be patched each day. The child should never wear the patch for the entire day. The child must have one hour each day when the stronger eye is not covered in order to keep it seeing well. It is important to patch the stronger eye every day. It is probably best to get into a routine where the child wears the patch at the same time each day. You can also break up the patching into 2 periods each day – for example 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the evening if 6 hours are recommended.

The doctor will examine your child at specific times during the patching therapy to monitor the progress. It is very important that you keep these follow-up appointments. The doctor will discuss when to make changes in the amount of patching and when you can stop patching. Children who are older when

patching is started and children who have poorer vision will usually require patching for longer periods of time – often many months.

How can I help my child during patching therapy?

It is very important that the child's parents and caretakers understand the importance of patching. When done properly, patching is usually very effective and the improvement in the child's vision can last a lifetime. Unfortunately, if the child is not cooperative, decreased vision may also last a lifetime.

When starting to patch, you should explain to your child the reason for patching. Also, patching your child's dolls or toys may be a helpful way to encourage patching. Remember to be positive and encouraging. A good time to start is when a parent or a caregiver can give your child special attention. This can help create a positive attitude about patching. If your child goes to school, explain the patching treatment and schedule to the teachers. Let the teachers know that your child will not be seeing as well when one eye is patched, and may have some difficulty or hesitation when doing schoolwork. The teachers may also explain patching to your child's classmates.

You should do fun activities with your child while the patch is worn. This will give the weaker eye a "work-out", and will also show your child all the things they can do while wearing the patch. Consider activities such as mazes, dot-to-dot games, puzzles, word searches, coloring books, threading beads on a string, board or card games, and video games. Parents may find it helpful to give the child a small reward after they have worn their patch correctly for a certain number of hours or days.

It is very important that you provide a safe environment for your child when the patch is worn. Since you will be patching the child's better eye, the child will be seeing only with the weaker eye. You will need to make sure to prevent accidental injuries, especially when you first start patching.

Can patching cause loss of vision in the good eye?

It is very rare for patching to permanently decrease the vision in the good eye. It is important that you follow the patching schedule. It is also important that your child sees the doctor for all of the follow-up appointments so that we can check the vision in both eyes.

The skin around the eye is irritated – what can I do?

Consider using a different brand of adhesive patch because different adhesives are used by the different brands. You may try leaving some of the paper backing on the patch so that less of the adhesive contacts the skin. If you have already tried different brands of adhesive patches you may want to try using non adhesive patches.

My child refuses to keep the patch on - are there any alternatives?

There are other options to improve vision in the weaker eye if your child absolutely refuses to have the eye patched. Patching is usually prescribed first because it has been used for decades and works very well. An alternative to patching is for the parent to give the child a special type of prescription eye drops that will blur the vision in the stronger eye. There are some side effects and risks from the eye drops and the doctor can discuss this with you.

For more information or to learn about "The Eye Patch Club", log on to
www.preventblindness.org/children/