



Bring your child to Retina Specialists, particularly for their first examination, may feel a little daunting both for you as parents, and for your child. This information sheet provides some information to help prepare your child to make it as stress-free as possible.

Your child's age will determine how much they understand about going for an eye examination, but if they're old enough, it's a good idea to talk about the eye examination at least a day or two before you go. Introduce them to some of the things that will happen at the examination. Make sure they know the ophthalmologist will ask them to look at and identify objects. These could be pictures, letters, or shapes of light on the wall. The eye charts are not testing how smart your child is, they're checking to see how clearly they can see. Your child might worry about getting the "right" answer rather than letting us know what they can or cannot see. Share with your child your enthusiasm for the visit. Your child will expect an enjoyable experience if you set the tone for fun. Be sure to bring any glasses or contact lenses, if applicable, to each visit.

Explain that the ophthalmologist may require that drops are put in their eyes. Try not to use the word "hurt". We liken it to jumping in a swimming pool and getting water in your eyes. It feels a bit funny initially, but after a few blinks, will be OK. Be honest with your child and work with the technician or ophthalmologist to reassure them.

One of our ophthalmic technicians will place eye drops into the eye. These drops contain medication that will enlarge (dilate) the pupil of the eye. A larger pupil helps the ophthalmologist examine the inside and back of the eye, allowing for the most accurate diagnosis and best treatment of your child's eye condition. It also allows us to test the focus of the eyes.

The first drop is a numbing drop, so the next drop(s) shouldn't be felt at all. They might sting, but only for a few seconds. Depending on your child's eyes, it may take 20 to 40 minutes for the drops to take effect. Once dilated, your child's pupil can remain dilated anywhere from four to 24 hours and may cause blurred vision for some of that time. Dilation tends to last longer in people with darker coloured eyes, and occasionally a child's eyes may stay dilated for longer than 24 hours.

You may want to practice eye drops and looking in your child's eye. If you have a small bottle, you can pretend to put drops in a stuffed animal or doll's eye and then in your child's eye. Have them tip their head back, close their eyes, say "drop!" and then have them blink.

If you would prefer to put the eye drops in your children's eyes please let the ophthalmologist or technician know.

Sunglasses may be helpful after a dilated eye exam to protect your child's eyes from sensitivity to light. Your child can return to school, but teachers should be aware of dilated eyes and possible blurred vision.

Things to know about the eye exam

As much as you would want to make your trips to the ophthalmologist easy, for children, it is a little different. Children are afraid of tests and being under too much scrutiny. This means that, for the most part, they might resist going to the ophthalmologists. Eye exams, however, should not be scary. Most doctors and technicians that handle children's cases are often kind and friendly to help keep the children at ease. Still, there is more you can do to make your child comfortable during an eye exam:

- **Be around for the exam** – having a familiar face during the exam can make the child feel safer than not. As a parent, insist to be part of the eye exam. You can even hold your child's hand as the ophthalmologist checks them.
- **Keep a stuffed animal on hand** – children love toys. They associate them with fun, comfort, and safety. In the exam, bringing your child's favourite stuffed animal or toy can be a big help. Let them hold on to them through the examination session.
- **Use affirming words** – as a parent, assuring your child that they will be okay might be the only thing they need.
- **Appointment duration** – you will be doing some waiting, especially if you child's eyes will be dilated, which is likely, especially if it their first visit to the ophthalmologist.
- **Examination** – even though most of the examination does not hurt, a number of children can become nervous, especially when the ophthalmologist is looking in their eyes.
- **Dilation** – dilating eye drop sting, but it is temporary (only a few seconds).