Nystagmus

This material will help you understand nystagmus and how it is treated.

What is nystagmus?
Nystagmus is described as involuntary eye movements. Usually both eyes move from side to side. Sometimes only one eye is affected or the movements are vertical or circular. These movements can be quick or slow and may vary with the direction of your child's gaze.

How does nystagmus affect my child’s eyesight?
Even though the eyes appear to be shaking, children with nystagmus usually see a steady image. To help clear the image, your child may adopt a head position where the movements are less severe.

What causes nystagmus?
Eye movements are controlled by the brain. Abnormal movements can result from a variety of causes. In congenital nystagmus the movements are present from an early age and children may not have any other associated conditions. Other causes of nystagmus include lesions affecting the brain such as tumors or strokes, as well as medications and certain infections. Sometimes the cause of nystagmus remains unclear even after a thorough examination.

How is nystagmus treated?
Treatment varies with the cause of nystagmus. In some cases, glasses can help make the eye movements less severe and improve vision. In other cases, eye muscle surgery may be required to improve an uncomfortable head position.

What will my child’s eyesight be like when he/she is an adult?
Visual acuity in children with nystagmus can range from very good (20/20) to poor (less than 20/400). It is difficult to accurately predict the final visual acuity of any child when they are first diagnosed.

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