

Kaiser Permanente

Pseudostrabismus and Strabismus

What is strabismus?

Strabismus is a condition in which the eyes point in different directions. Usually one eye is pointed straight ahead and the other is pointed in, out, up, or down. Strabismus can cause poor vision unless it is treated. It also can affect your appearance.

What is pseudostrabismus?

Pseudostrabismus is the appearance of strabismus when it is not truly present. Some babies and young children appear to have strabismus, especially esotropia (an eye turning in), when they do not.

Babies often have a wide, flat nose bridge that can make their eyes appear crossed. Also, babies can have folds in the skin of the inner eyelids that cover the inner white part of the eyes, making their eyes look crossed. The illusion of crossed eyes can be even more pronounced when the baby looks to one side.

How is pseudostrabismus diagnosed?

Eye doctors (ophthalmologists) use simple tests to tell the difference between strabismus and pseudostrabismus. For example, the doctor may hold a small light in front of a child's eyes and look to see whether the reflection of this light is properly centered in each eye. In another test, the doctor covers one of the child's eyes and then the other to see if the eyes shift abnormally when focusing on a near or distant target.

What should be done for a child with pseudostrabismus?

No treatment is needed for pseudostrabismus. The appearance of misaligned eyes often improves as a child gets older.

What should be done for a child with strabismus?

A child with strabismus should be treated promptly by an ophthalmologist. One type of treatment, surgery on abnormal eye muscles, is quite successful if done when the child is young--and the younger, the better. Even if surgery is not needed, other treatments have a better chance of promoting the best vision possible out of both eyes if they begin when the child is young.

If your child is also diagnosed with amblyopia (which sometimes accompanies strabismus), further treatment may be needed.

Regardless of your child's age, have his or her eyes examined by an eye doctor if you suspect strabismus. True strabismus cannot be outgrown.

