

A Parent's FAQ on 3D Eye Health Concerns for Children

Q&A with VSP® Optometrist, Dr. Nathan Bonilla-Warford



3D entertainment continues to increase—with films, gaming devices, and computer games filling the market—kids just can't seem to get enough! However, with Nintendo's recent warning that children ages six and under shouldn't be using 3D, there are many misconceptions and fears about how 3D technology affects children's eyes.

To explain some common misconceptions around 3D, VSP Vision Care Optometrist, Dr. Nathan Bonilla-Warford, offers answers to questions about 3D and our eyes:

Q: What should we make of recent claims by Nintendo and various 3D-Television manufacturers that young children shouldn't use 3D technology?

A: 3D technology can be visually stressful for some people. The concern about children using 3D technology is because their visual skills are still developing. However, the optometric community agrees that 3D movies and games don't cause permanent damage to your eyes, and are safe for children to use in moderation.

Q: Do symptoms like nausea, headache, and eye strain while watching 3D indicate long-term problems?

A: Generally, "vision sickness" symptoms are short term and will go away when the 3D viewing stops. However, these symptoms can signal more significant visual problems, such as amblyopia (lazy eye), strabismus (misaligned eyes), or convergence insufficiency (difficulty turning the eyes in when looking up-close). Regular check-ups with your child's eye doctor or pediatrician will help diagnose these problems, which are often treatable.

Q: Can 3D technology actually expose underlying vision problems?

A: Yes—3D movies and games are not only fun, but they can actually reveal binocular vision problems too. In order to see 3D effects, your child needs functioning "stereoscopic vision." Watch for warning signs, like red eyes, eye-rubbing, squinting, and skipping lines when reading. If you notice any of these symptoms, make an appointment with an eye doctor for your child's annual eye exam. Remember, children are often less aware of these symptoms and may not complain of discomfort for fear of having their games taken away. If you notice any of these symptoms, make an appointment with an eye doctor for an eye exam.

Q: What should parents do if their child is experiencing “vision sickness” symptoms or are unable to see in 3D?

A: If your child is experiencing “vision sickness” symptoms or are unable to appreciate the 3D effect, a comprehensive eye exam is necessary to see if there’s an underlying vision problem. It’s recommended that children receive eye exams starting at age six months, then at three years, before kindergarten, and every year after that.

Q: What’s the most important message that parents should bear in mind before purchasing 3D technology?

A: 3D is okay in moderation. A good idea when you’re doing anything that’s visually demanding—whether it be reading, playing games, or watching TV—is to take breaks every so often. One rule of thumb is the 20-20-20 rule—every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds and give your eyes a break!



For more information on 3D eye health concerns, please visit vsp.com/3D.

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