

Colorado's Doctors of Optometry Offer 5 Ways to Prepare for School in a Pandemic

DENVER, Colo., Aug. 19, 2020 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – The 2020-2021 school year is starting with a baseline of caution, anxiety and an ever-changing game plan during a global pandemic. Local doctors of optometry have teamed up with the [Colorado Optometric Association](#) and [2020 Eyes Colorado](#) to compile a unique list of five areas to consider as families near the start of school.



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PHOTO CAPTION: Colorado doctors of optometry agree that considering five specific areas of need, families can build a healthy foundation for learning while avoiding unnecessary difficulties.

Many families are struggling to feel comfortable with an in-person learning environment and others are opting for distance learning this year. Regardless of the learning environment, school in Colorado will be different for now and families are attempting to plan while facing many unknowns.

However, experts do know that about 80% of what a student learns is presented visually, which makes eye health very important for student learning.

Optometrists are often part of a multi-disciplinary team of health-care practitioners that contribute to diagnosing learning difficulties when challenges present in school.

Colorado doctors of optometry agree that considering five specific areas of need, families can build a healthy foundation for learning while avoiding unnecessary difficulties.

1. Assess the Student's Vision & Eye Health

It's highly recommended that each student gets a **comprehensive eye exam**, every year. It's even more important this year as children are experiencing increased stress, anxiety, countless lifestyle changes and more screen time than ever. This can be a recipe for vision changes that can impact learning if they aren't addressed.

A comprehensive eye exam gives the patient and doctor a look at overall physical health in addition to eye health. Optometrists are often able to diagnose general health and eye health conditions before symptoms occur. This makes early intervention and treatment possible before vision and learning is heavily impacted.

"It's so important for each student to get their eyes checked as part of supporting their learning. It's especially important to rule out a visual issue if your child is struggling with reading, headaches, coordination, blurry vision, double vision, or dry eyes. With the recent screen time increases, we want to make sure that student eye health is not a problem for the school year," says Dr. Tom Cruse, President at Colorado Optometric Association.

Visual Skills Essential for K-12 Learning

During a comprehensive eye exam an optometrist is assessing the child's visual skills in the below areas. These areas are essential for learning and if the eyes are not functioning well in these capacities learning is often impacted negatively.

- Good visual acuity at all distances
- Satisfactory eye teaming skills
- Satisfactory eye movement skills
- Satisfactory focusing skills

If a child is already experiencing learning difficulties and has one or more of the below listed symptoms, they may have a learning-related vision problem. It's recommended that the child has a comprehensive evaluation by an optometrist who specializes in children's vision and learning-related vision problems.

Symptoms of Learning-related Vision Problems*:

- Headaches or eye strain
- Blurred vision or double vision
- Crossed eyes or eyes that appear to move independently of each other (Read more about strabismus.)
- Dislike or avoidance of reading and close work
- Short attention span during visual tasks
- Turning or tilting the head to use one eye only, or closing or covering one eye
- Placing the head very close to the book or desk when reading or writing
- Excessive blinking or rubbing the eyes
- Losing place while reading, or using a finger as a guide
- Slow reading speed or poor reading comprehension
- Difficulty remembering what was read
- Omitting or repeating words, or confusing similar words
- Persistent reversal of words or letters (after second grade)
- Difficulty remembering, identifying or reproducing shapes
- Poor eye-hand coordination
- Evidence of developmental immaturity

*Symptoms list created by [Think About Your Eyes](#), April 2017

2. Create a Family Stress Management Plan

Eye twitching, blurry vision, headaches, watery eyes or dry eyes can all be caused by stress. In fact, stress can cause vision issues and vision issues can cause stress. Don't get caught in this cycle!

This year, there are a lot of new stressors for students beyond learning and homework. Having a stress management plan for each person in the home will help everyone stay happy, healthy, learning, and working.

It's a good idea to start talking to each child about what their school day will look like and prepare them for the things that are changing.

By managing stress daily, families can then build a daily schedule and house rules around each family member that helps them find success.

3. Assure the Student is Eating Well

Nutrition can impact how we feel emotionally and physically, but it also impacts eye health. A child's eating habits can change as they experience stress and as daily schedules change. When some people experience stress they eat less and others eat more. What is healthy and effective for each student?

Making sure the child is eating enough breakfast, lunch, and dinner is

helpful. Or maybe they aren't into full meals right now so making sure they are grazing throughout the day will help keep blood sugar balanced, stress low, and it also can mean less tantrums or moodiness.

10 Nutrient Dense Foods to keep eyes healthy and brains learning:

- Fish is rich in omega-3 fatty acids
- Nuts and legumes are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E
- Seeds are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E
- Citrus fruits rich in vitamin C
- Leafy greens rich in lutein and zeaxanthin
- Carrots rich in vitamin A and beta carotene
- Sweet potatoes rich in beta carotene and vitamin E
- Beef is rich in zinc
- Eggs rich in lutein and zeaxanthin
- Water prevents dehydration and keeps your brain running

4. Determine How Much Exercise the Student Needs

Exercise increases blood flow to the optic nerve and retina, reduces stress, improves alertness, motivation, attention and it even helps individuals retain information.

When schedules change one of the first things to cease is healthy exercise. Whether attending school in-person or online, determine how the child get the exercise they need to thrive? How can exercise be used as a tool during the school year? Some families have students jump on a mini-trampoline or do jumping jacks before tackling homework or a school lesson. Others use it as a motivational reward. [Tips for getting kids to exercise.](#)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) recommends the following activity levels for:

- Children ages 3-5 years should have active play throughout the day.
- Children ages 6-17 should have one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Including;
 - activities to strengthen bones 3 days per week (ex: running or jumping)
 - activities to build muscles 3 days per week (ex: climbing or push- ups)

5. Address Sleep Difficulties

Dark circles around their eyes, moodiness, fatigue, difficulty learning, forgetfulness, and lack of motivation are all common signs of poor sleep. Poor sleep is not conducive to a successful learning environment and it can also strain family relationships. It's a good idea to address everyone's

sleep issues in the household for optimal learning, working, playing and relating.

Sleep is clearly important for everyone and students are no exception. It's also very common for sleep to be impacted by stress and anxiety. Improving sleep could be as simple as better sleep hygiene, a new pillow, reducing stress or eliminating screen time before bed. However, sometimes there's an actual health issue at play. If sleep doesn't get better with common sense adjustments and is impacting daily life (like school) it's time to consult a doctor.

During a comprehensive eye exam an optometrist may spot signs of sleep issues including sleep apnea or other health conditions that are associated with sleep difficulties like pediatric myopia, diabetes, glaucoma, or an autoimmune disease.

The [CDC](#) recommends the following sleep quantity for:

- Ages 3-5 years: 10-13 hours per 24 hours (including naps)
- Ages 6-12 years: 9-12 hours per 24 hours
- Ages 13-18 years: 8-10 hours per 24 hours

Tips to Improve Sleep:

- Stick to a sleep schedule, go to bed at the same time and wake at the same time even on the weekends.
- Remove screens from the bedroom including phones, TVs, and tablets.
- Stop the use of any screen one hour before bedtime to reduce blue light exposure.
- Make sure the child's sleep environment is comfortable for them and includes their unique sleep preferences.
- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and before bed.
- Make sure the child is getting enough exercise during the day.

About the Colorado Optometric Association (COA):

The Colorado Optometric Association (COA) is the professional organization of optometrists in Colorado. Over 600 Colorado Doctors of Optometry are voluntary members of the Association. COA has also launched a public health campaign called [2020 Eyes Colorado](#).

Since 1892, the COA has assisted its members in providing the highest standard of professional care to their patients by sponsoring continuing education programs for doctors, advocating in local and state governments for programs and laws that represent patients' best interests, and providing information for the public.

For more information, please visit <http://www.visioncare.org/> or call

303-863-9778.