

Nystagmus



Description

Nystagmus is a rhythmic, repetitive, involuntary movement of the eyes and is independent to normal eye movement. In nystagmus, eye movements are faster in one direction than the other. There are several forms of nystagmus that are named according to the eye movement, such as rotational, horizontal, pendular, vertical or roving.

If nystagmus is present there is usually a disorder involving the anterior visual pathway (retina, optic nerve, optic chiasm, or optic tract). Nystagmus may also result from decreased vision from conditions such as chorioretinitis, corneal opacities, cataracts, albinism, optic atrophy, macula disease or optic nerve hypoplasia.

Implications

Nystagmus may be congenital (occurring in infancy) or acquired (occurring later in life) and is often the first indication of vision concerns in children.

The condition causes reduced and blurred vision due to uncontrollable eye movement and a lower visual acuity (clarity or sharpness of vision) as a result of difficulty in maintaining fixation. However, individuals with nystagmus perceive objects as being stationary, despite the rhythmical movement of their eyes.

Head tilting is a common strategy to reduce eye movement and sharpen vision. Individuals with nystagmus are often able to achieve a certain head tilt, known as the 'null point' or 'null position' to reduce and slow the frequency and size of movement and achieve enhanced vision and improved visual acuity.

Creating a 'reading position' (in which eyes are pulled inward towards the nose) may also minimise eye movement.

Nystagmus may increase when the eyes are tired, staring at a distant object, or if the student is stressed, fatigued or hungry.

Accessing the curriculum

Reduce classroom environmental glare. Avoid whiteboards, reflective white paper (buff may provide better access), and instruction next to windows.

Consider slightly enlarging print and the provision of dark lined paper. Ensure strong contrast.

Use additional verbal descriptions to support instruction and understanding.

Reduce visual clutter by ensuring learning materials are well spaced and well organised on a page.

Remove unnecessary visual information.

Use bullet points rather than long narrative text when presenting information.

Encourage the use of the 'null point' or 'null position' and allow the student some extra time to process visual information and find their best viewing position.

Consider the impact of visual fatigue and offer eye rest time after prolonged reading and writing activities.

Magnification for both distance and near viewing may be useful.

Click to see an [Interactive Eye Diagram](#) (web link)

As this document contains generic information, please consult with the Vision Education Program in regard to individual educational needs.

References

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