



# Supporting Your Infant with Visual Impairment

## What are visual impairments?

Visual impairments are conditions which may affect your infant's sense of sight through problems in different parts of their eyes or brain. There are many different types of visual impairments which may range from mild to very severe. The most common types of visual impairments include childhood cataracts, near-sightedness and colour-blindness.

## When will visual impairments be picked up?

Most countries have routine check-ups in which your infant's eyesight will be assessed. This should be able to identify any concerns that your health care practitioner may have. There is often a physical eye exam soon after birth, which will involve the practitioner carefully checking the appearance, position and movement of your infant's eyes by shining a light into their eyes. This is a test for conditions such as congenital cataracts, which is where the lens within the eye becomes cloudy and impairs vision. This test cannot determine how well your infant can see. There are also routine tests throughout later childhood to screen for other vision impairments. This may involve using Snellen charts, to test for visual acuity, or Ishihara plates, to test for colour blindness. If your child is not yet old enough to read, these tests can be done with pictures and shapes for them to identify.

## Who should I tell and where can I find help?

If you have any concerns about your infant's vision, contact your GP or paediatrician. They will be able to do some tests to identify any problems. Eyesight tests can be requested and done at any age if there are concerns about vision. You will find 'Further Information' about infant vision concerns beside this resource on the Butterfly Baby Club webpage. There you will also see information about other supportive resources for parents of children with visual impairments.

## How can I support my infant?

Supporting infants with visual impairments is extremely important for their learning and confidence. There will be different types of support required depending on which condition your infant may have.

Congenital or childhood cataracts is a cloudiness of the lens within the eye. Generally, it is difficult to identify the cause of why your infant may be born with or develop cataracts. Cataracts in children may hinder their eyesight development. However, identification and treatment of cataracts early on can preserve normal eyesight. In severe cases, your doctor may recommend surgery to remove the cloudy lens. This may be followed by a lens replacement surgery or the use of corrective contact lenses or glasses. Post-operative care will be discussed with your doctor and nurses to ensure that the risks of the surgery are minimal. Regular monitoring of your infant's eyes and vision will be done by an ophthalmologist.

It is also important to develop a secure bond with your baby and encourage positive social interactions. Try to speak in a calm tone to let your infant know where you are beside them. It may be helpful to communicate with them in other ways as they may not be able to see you. For example, a light touch before picking them up can help your infant recognise when you are about to lift them. This will also prevent them from being startled or scared if they cannot see you clearly.

It is normal to be concerned about your infant's eyesight and how an eye condition may affect them in the future. Early identification and treatment have made it possible and highly likely that your infant will live a normal life with their condition. Please see the 'Further Information' section and explore other resources in the Butterfly Baby Club collection related to bonding with your baby, promoting communication and looking after your own wellbeing.