

Children's headaches rarely indicate a need for eyeglasses

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A new study provides the first clear evidence that vision or eye problems are rarely the cause of recurring headaches in children, even if the headaches usually strike while the child is doing schoolwork or other visual tasks. Many parents assume that frequent headaches mean their child needs glasses, so they ask their doctor to refer their child for an eye exam. This study was conducted by pediatric ophthalmologists who wanted to find reliable answers for parents, family doctors and pediatricians facing this common health question. The research is being presented today at the 116th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, conducted jointly this year with the Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology.

In this [retrospective study](#), which was conducted at the ophthalmology clinic of Albany Medical Center in New York state, researchers reviewed the medical records of 158 children under age 18 who were seen at the clinic for frequent [headaches](#) from 2002-11. All of the children received complete [eye exams](#) by the clinic's ophthalmologists.

No significant correlation was found between their frequent headaches and a need for [vision correction](#). The researchers reached this conclusion by comparing the results of the clinic's exams of the children with headaches to the records of their previous eye exams and other relevant medical care. Eye health and [vision test](#) results remained unchanged from earlier exams for 75 percent of the children. Also, children who already had eyeglasses were not found to need new prescriptions at the time they were seen at the clinic for headaches. Although about 14

percent of the children reported that their headaches occurred while doing [visual tasks](#) like homework, and about nine percent reported visual symptoms associated with their headaches, a need for vision correction did not appear to be the primary cause or a significant factor in any of these cases, according to the study.

The researchers considered it positive that most of the children's headaches resolved over time. Follow up reports from parents showed that headaches improved in 76.4 percent of all study subjects, including those who did and those who did not receive new vision correction prescriptions. Children who received new prescriptions were not more likely than others to have their headaches improve. Assessing the causes of the headaches and addressing the children's long-term outcomes were beyond the scope of this study.

"We hope our study will help reassure parents that in most cases their children's headaches are not related to vision or [eye problems](#), and that most headaches will clear up in time," said Zachary Roth, M.D., who led the research team. "The information should also be useful to [family doctors](#) and pediatricians in caring for children and parents who have this common health concern."

About thirty percent of the children in the study had eye conditions that went beyond the need for vision correction, including strabismus (misaligned eyes) amblyopia ("lazy eye") or other rarer, more serious conditions. Seventeen percent had a family history of migraine. Because this was a retrospective study, the researchers were unable to connect these factors with headache causes.

Provided by American Academy of Ophthalmology

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