Epidemiology of Amblyopia

Over the years, numerous articles in the medical literature have reported that 2 to 4% of children in the U.S. have amblyopia. Approximately 4 million babies were born in the U.S. in 2011: this means that almost 120,000 babies who were born in 2011 will develop, or have developed, amblyopia since their birth.

Amblyopia is a decrease in vision for which no cause is identified by physical examination of the eye. It is frequently referred to as “lazy eye”, and in most cases affects only one eye. It is a preventable vision loss: if diagnosed prior to 10 years of age and treated by an eye care professional, visual acuity in the amblyopic eye may in most cases be improved to normal or near normal levels. Amblyopia is a frequent consequence of strabismus, an eye muscle disorder, such as a crossed eye; anisometropia the difference in the need for glasses between the two eyes; or a deprivation situation, such as drooping of one eyelid that may block the vision.

Why is this important for parents? As the eye is a part of the brain, the presence of amblyopia, whatever its cause, interferes with the brain’s responses to what that eye sees. In children, amblyopia results from “shutting off” the abnormal reception coming from the amblyopic eye, and loss of depth perception occurs. This may affect a child’s performance in school and sports; ultimately if left untreated or undertreated, it may affect career selection.

Fortunately, amblyopia can be easily diagnosed by eye care professionals. Several treatments, most notably patching of the good eye, typically result in a positive visual outcome when performed as directed. Early recognition and proper treatment: the keys to the child’s present and future visual well-being!