



Visual Processing Problems (Visual Perceptual Problems)

What is a visual processing problem?

The ability to analyze and interpret visual input is sometimes referred to as visual processing or visual perceptual skills. Optometrists believe this is an important aspect of vision, particularly for children in first through fifth grades.

Just because a child can see clearly and comfortably does not guarantee he/she will be able to use the incoming information. Visual processing can be broken down into several areas including:

- Laterality and directionality
- Visual form perception
- Visual memory
- Visual motor integration

These skills are important when a young child is learning letter and number recognition, reading and early math skills. We believe visual processing skills develop in most children without the need for any special attention or intervention. However, in some children, the development of visual processing skills does not keep pace with the child's growth in other areas. This type of lag can lead to difficulty in early grades.

What types of visual processing problems can occur?

When a child has developmental lags in the area of visual processing, it can result in a variety of problems including:

- Deficiencies in ***visual motor integration*** skills, which may make handwriting more difficult. This results in poor spacing, an inability to stay on the line and excessive erasures. The child's ability to complete written work within an allotted period of time may also be affected.
- Dysfunctions in ***visual memory*** may cause prolonged time copying assignments, difficulty recognizing the same word on the next page and difficulty retaining what is seen or read.
- Confusion in the area of ***directionality*** may result in reversals of forms, letters such as "b" and "d" and words such as "on" and "no" and "was" and "saw."
- ***Visual form perception*** and discrimination problems may result in confusing similar beginnings, endings and even entire words.

How common are visual processing problems?

Approximately 15%-20% of children with learning problems have visual processing problems, which are significant enough to interfere with school performance.

What should I do if I suspect my child has a visual processing problem?

If a child is experiencing any of the problems listed above, a visual processing

examination is necessary. This special examination usually lasts about one hour. The tests performed probe the areas listed above and may lead to a better understanding of why a child is not performing up to his/her potential.

It is important to emphasize it is not enough to have just any vision examination. The doctor must administer tests, which specifically probe for visual processing or visual perceptual problems. This should be discussed with the doctor before an appointment is made.

How are visual processing problems treated?

Eyeglasses cannot be used to treat visual processing problems. Rather, another form of treatment must be used. This is referred to as **VISION THERAPY**.

Vision therapy is a treatment approach, which involves weekly office visits. During these visits, the patient practices carefully selected and sequenced activities. This treatment is designed to help the child reach his/her normal level of development in the visual processing skills found to be deficient.

Will vision therapy alone eliminate the child's learning problems?

Improvements in visual processing should not be expected to directly improve school or reading performance. However, these deficiencies can often be barriers to effective learning. Therefore, improvements in these visual skills can result in better learning efficiency and concentration and enable the child to benefit from standard or remedial education. In almost all cases, the child will require tutoring to overcome reading, math or other academic problems. The combination of vision therapy and tutoring will often lead to the best overall result. In some cases, counseling may also be helpful.