

For Immediate Release

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New Research Gives Hope to Children with Common Reading-Related Vision Disorder

One Out of Every 20 School-Age Children Could Benefit

On Monday, the National Institute of Health released a study showing that there is a more effective treatment for children who have a common reading-related vision disorder. Convergence insufficiency (CI) is an eye condition which leads to some or all of the following: loss of concentration, slow reading, eye strain, headaches, blurred or double vision and ultimately impacts learning.

CI, a common childhood eye muscle coordination problem, is often missed in many routine vision screenings because these screenings test distance vision, not the visual skills required for reading. For this reason many children can be misdiagnosed with learning disabilities when, in fact, they have a treatable eye condition.

The NIH study was a collaborative study with both optometrists and ophthalmologists involved in 9 sites throughout the United States. The study included 221 children ages 9 to 17 and compared different forms of treatment, including the most commonly prescribed “pencil push-ups” in addition to a placebo therapy activity. After 12 weeks of treatment, nearly 75 percent of the children that were given office-based Vision Therapy along with at-home reinforcement exercises achieved normal vision or had significantly fewer symptoms of CI. While there have been hundreds of optometric studies over the years, this is the first scientific study to look at these treatment protocols.

It also found that two commonly prescribed home-based therapy programs were no more effective than placebo treatment. Office-based Vision Therapy is provided by trained Vision Therapists who traditionally work in optometric offices under the direction of an optometrist.

“This study shows that, once diagnosed, CI can be successfully treated with office-based vision therapy by a trained therapist along with at-home reinforcement. This is very encouraging news for parents, educators, and anyone who may know a child with CI,” said principle investigator Mitchell Scheiman, O.D., of Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University.

Pamela Happ, Executive Director of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (an international non-profit membership association of eye care professionals devoted to developmental vision care and vision therapy), is elated with the study results. *“Many eye care professionals, as well as parents, doubted which treatment options for convergence insufficiency*

were effective. Now this definitive, double blind, masked, placebo-controlled study demonstrates conclusively that in-office vision therapy by trained professionals is the most effective solution.” She now hopes many more eye doctors will either refer patients who have CI to optometrists who provide vision therapy or get the education necessary to provide vision therapy in their offices.

Vision therapy is an advanced optometric specialty service that has been in existence for over 70 years. All optometrists learn about vision therapy in optometry school, but most optometrists who provide vision therapy receive post graduate education in the subject.

This study is particularly important because it showed that treatment can significantly reduce symptoms when a child reads which may impact on reading performance. *“We found decreases in the frequency and severity of symptoms that might make schoolwork more difficult. Parents reported that they saw a significant decrease in their child having difficulty completing schoolwork at school or at home, appearing inattentive or easily distracted when completing schoolwork, and avoiding schoolwork. In addition, parents reported that they worried less about their child’s school performance,”* added Scheiman.

When a child struggles with reading and learning it costs their parents dearly in terms of time, money and frustration. In addition, there are significant costs to the schools that inadvertently misdiagnose this problem.

When a vision problem is at the root of a child’s difficulties, the symptoms can be easily detected, if you know what to look for. For an in-depth symptom checklist, more information on vision problems that block learning, or to find a doctor who provides vision therapy, go to: www.visionforlearning.org.

About COVD

The College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) is an international, non-profit optometric membership organization that provides education, evaluation and board certification programs in behavioral and developmental vision care, optometric vision therapy and vision rehabilitation. The organization is comprised of doctors of optometry, vision therapists and other vision specialists. For more information on convergence insufficiency, learning-related vision problems, vision therapy, COVD and our open access journal, *Optometry & Vision Development*, please visit www.covd.org.