

Common Misconceptions:

*I never understood that my eyes could be fixed.
I was told that strabismus surgery doesn't work for adults.
I heard it could cause permanent double vision.
I thought it was cosmetic and that insurance wouldn't cover it.*

These are some of the most common statements adult patients make when initially meeting with a strabismus doctor.

Strabismus is a condition where the eyes do not align and can result in reduced depth perception and decreased quality of life. Adult strabismus is common. Its incidence rises throughout adulthood, sharply increasing after age 60 and peaking at age 80. With a lifetime risk of nearly 4%, it is more prevalent than childhood strabismus. Importantly, intervention has been shown to positively impact binocularity, employment opportunities and self-esteem. With these proven benefits, it is surprising that adult patients are often directly or indirectly discouraged from seeking permanent treatment.

In fact: While most patients and caregivers are aware that childhood strabismus can be treated with glasses, patching or surgery, misconceptions exist around treatment for adults. For example, some patients have been told that surgery does not work for adults. Others are discouraged from seeking treatment due to a perceived risk of permanent double vision. In reality, over 80% of patients achieve satisfactory alignment with one surgery and less than 0.7% of patients experience persistent diplopia.¹

New onset adult strabismus is usually accompanied by double vision. Causes include trauma, stroke, thyroid eye disease or tumors. These patients are more likely to seek medical treatment to alleviate the diplopia, and may be sent to an eye doctor during the acute time frame. In instances when the diplopia becomes chronic, many patients are told that nothing can be done and may not ask their care team for further information. By contrast, partially treated childhood strabismus that recurs as an adult rarely causes diplopia. These patients may also discontinue their pursuit of treatment, particularly if they are incorrectly told that treatment will not improve binocularity.

Adults with strabismus may have reduced depth perception, visual confusion or double vision. Numerous studies have shown that ocular misalignment can interfere with employment opportunities, social interactions and self-esteem. Surgery for strabismus is considered reconstructive, not cosmetic, and is generally covered by insurance as it may restore binocularity; can improve the peripheral field in patients whose eyes cross; and restores self-confidence, leading to higher quality of life scores.²

Treatment: Treatment for adult strabismus is designed to restore normal alignment of the two eyes. Several interventions may be available depending on the patient's medical findings. For acute medical causes such as trauma or diabetes, prism glasses may temporarily eliminate diplopia during the healing process, allowing the patient to return to regular activities including driving and work. For persistent smaller amounts of strabismus, prism glasses may be a permanent solution. Certain types of orthoptic exercises may improve ability to align eyes, and can often be performed at home. When the degree of strabismus is larger, surgery may be offered, often freeing patients from dependence on heavier prism glasses. Patients with esotropia may gain up to 25% of their peripheral visual field when the crossed eye is straightened.

Strabismus surgery is a day procedure typically performed under general anesthesia. Patients spend a few days after surgery at home and typically experience rapid recovery. Sutures dissolve spontaneously and most patients find that they may return to full activity within a week.

What should you do if you have a patient who may benefit from intervention for strabismus?

Talk directly about the strabismus. Often, patients are waiting for their doctor to broach the subject, even if they previously have indicated it is not an issue. Discuss the fact that a strabismus expert can walk them through both non-surgical and surgical options. Explain that if surgery is recommended, it is a safe procedure that can be life-altering. Restoration of some binocularity, improved visual field and positive psychosocial benefits may be seen. Insurance will generally cover this as a medical or reconstructive procedure.

A conversation between a primary care physician and an adult patient with strabismus can quickly dispel common misconceptions and lead to life-altering benefits of treatment.

We are pleased to offer Adult Strabismus evaluations to assist your patients. They may be scheduled by calling 651-275-3000.

Sources:

1. Kushner BJ. 2014, The benefits, risks, and efficacy of strabismus surgery in adults. *Optom Vis Sci* 2014; 91(5):e102-109.

2 Nelson BA, Gunton KB, Lasker JN, et al. The psychosocial aspects of strabismus in teenagers and adults and the impact of surgical correction. *J Aapos* 2008;12:72Y6 e1.

The information provided here is for the purpose of general education. It is not intended as medical advice for specific recipients of this article.



Susan Schloff, MD
*Pediatric Ophthalmology, Adult Eye Muscle Disorders
and Eye Muscle Surgery*

Associated Eye Care: 237 Radio Drive, Suite 100,
Woodbury M 55125 (651) 275-3000