



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Success with patching

Information for parents and carers



Orthoptic Department,
Oxford Eye Hospital

This leaflet has been written to give you advice on how to help with your child's patching treatment.

The 5 P's for successful patching

- **Praise**
- **Play**
- be **Positive**
- use **Patch** pack
- **Phone** if you need help

Your child has been given an eye patch to wear to treat a condition called amblyopia (lazy vision).

Most children take well to wearing their eye patch and can find it fun 'playing pirates' to help their lazy eye.

However, for other children, wearing a patch is a difficult experience. This may be for a number of reasons:

- The vision in their lazy eye is very poor and they are scared as they struggle to see when their good eye is covered.
- They can see well when both eyes are open and don't understand why they are being asked to use only one eye.
- They are too young to understand an explanation of why they need to wear their patch and their reaction is to fight against the putting on of a patch. Children under the age of two years are also usually too young to understand the rewards of a sticker chart for wearing their patch.
- Older children may be worried about what other people will think or say about their eye patch.

As a parent, you may also find it difficult to accept that your child needs to wear a patch to improve their vision.

You will have been made aware by the Orthoptist that there is only a limited time frame during which your child's vision can be improved. It gets more difficult to improve vision affected by a lazy eye as a child gets older. Very little improvement can be expected beyond the age of seven to eight, when their vision is fully developed. This may make you feel concerned about the consequences of your child not wearing their patch.

No parent likes to cause their child to become distressed or upset during treatment of any kind. You may be worried about having to battle to try to get your child to wear their patch.

We also understand that family life can be very hectic and busy. It can be difficult to cope sometimes, so having to also get your child to wear an eye patch might seem 'too much'.

We hope that the following suggestions will help:

- **Phone the Orthoptist if you are having difficulties in the first 1-2 weeks of patching treatment**

It is important that you get support and advice. If the Orthoptist is not available when you phone, please leave your contact details so that someone can call you back and talk through some ideas to try and help.

- **Children can be quick to pick up on parents' anxieties**

It is important to try and show a positive outlook and response to the need for patching treatment, as hard as this may be. Words of encouragement from the outset such as 'you look really cool being a pirate'; 'let's make a sticker chart for wearing your patch and put it on the bedroom wall'; 'let's make teddy (or other favourite toy) into a pirate too' are helpful.

Words such as 'I don't know how I'm going to get them/you to wear a patch' or 'they'll only pull it off' are more likely to cause problems with patching from the start.

- **Play is a very important part of successful patching**

Sitting down with your child and playing with them for the first 15-20 minutes when the patch is put on is extremely helpful. This will help distract your child from the patch and will help them get used to using their weaker eye.

This play can be anything from:

- using favourite toys
- building with Duplo/Lego bricks and asking your child to hunt for a certain colour brick
- painting or drawing
- making playdough – messy hands will help take your child's focus away from the patch.

For very young children, a 'finding' game can be useful, such as getting them to bring you different toys out of their toy box or using food or treats; picking up (and eating!) raisins, Smarties, cubes of carrot/apple, for example.

- **The first 15 minutes of patching can be the worst and most difficult time**

If you can get through this, it will become easier. Your child may panic at first as their good eye is covered, but through playing (as suggested above) they will realise they can see with their lazy eye and they can still play as they would do normally.

- **Patch packs**

Your Orthoptist will have given your child a patch pack at the hospital. This contains various sticker charts, colouring and activity sheets, etc. Use these to help your child through treatment.

In the early days of patching it may also help if they have a small treat at the end of each days patching session as a reward; there could also be a special prize at the end of the week if the patch has been worn every time they need to. These rewards can be spaced out each week and then progress to each month. You may of course, have your own idea about what would encourage your child to wear their patch.

- **Praise**

It is important to be positive and tell your child that they have done really well for **any** amount of time they have worn their patch. We advise against the use of threats such as 'if you don't wear your patch you won't be able to watch TV/go to the park/have your friend round to play', etc. This may make things worse.

- **Wearing the patch at nursery/school**

Children will often wear their patch when under someone else's care, but won't wear it at home! Ask the teachers and assistants at school if they will help with getting your child to wear their patch. The teacher may be able to use the patch during a 'show and tell' session, using this as an opportunity to tell the other children why your child needs to wear an eye patch. This may help your child to feel less self-conscious about wearing the patch.

- **Plan for a specific start and finish time for patch wearing that your child can understand**

This could be that the patch goes on at breakfast time and comes off at lunch time. This regular pattern will help your child get into the routine of patching. For an older child you could set a timer, so they know they can't take it off until it rings.

As mentioned previously, we fully understand that having to wear an eye patch can be stressful for you and your child. The first 15 minutes or so is the hardest. If you can get through this with lots of encouragement and playing some games to try and distract your child from the patch, they will realise they can still see well enough to play and get on with most of their normal activities. Also, as their vision improves, these activities will become easier.

Please be reassured that if your child screams and shouts, has a temper tantrum or just sits silently refusing to do anything whilst the patch is on, you are not the only one!

There is no evidence that patching treatment has any long term psychological effect on a child, but nonetheless this can be a difficult and emotional time. Your Orthoptist will be able to talk through any difficulties with you and offer you help and support.

Remember, things will get easier as the patching progresses and, don't forget, we are always here to help.

How to contact us

Please telephone the Orthoptic Department and ask to speak to an Orthoptist if you would like any further help or advice, or if you have any questions.

Tel: **01865 234 567**

and listen for the option for the Orthoptic Department
(8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

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Hospitals
Charity**

Author: Claire MacIntosh, Orthoptist
Head of Orthoptics: Jacqui Greenhalgh
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