

# Eye Problem Affects Schoolwork

BY ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

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**Dear Abby:** Please help me get the word out about a common condition that severely affects children's ability to succeed in school because it inhibits reading, spelling and concentration.

My daughter tested at 1st-grade reading level in 5th grade. She had undergone all the school testing for learning disabilities, plus two days of testing at a respected university hospital. None of these tests or specialists revealed what could be wrong with her.

My child's self-esteem suffered. She began acting out in school. At home she was a great kid, until it came time for schoolwork. She thought she was dumb. When studying, she could read for only a very short time. She often begged me to read things to her. When working on spelling and assigned to rewrite the words she missed five times, she often recopied them wrong. We thought she just wasn't trying.

After much research on the Internet, I came across a disorder called "convergence insufficiency disorder." This visual condition is the leading cause of eyestrain. Fortunately, we had the opportunity to have her tested at the Mayo Clinic, where her condition was confirmed, and she was successfully treated with vision therapy.

It was as though a miracle had occurred. After six months of treatment, my daughter is almost at her age-appropriate reading level. Her comprehension and retention have markedly increased, and her self-esteem and attitude about reading are much better.

Children with this condition will not benefit from tutoring, special education or extra help from teachers until the condition is diagnosed and treated. My child had 20/20 vision and still had this disorder.

I suspect that many children out there are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed and going untreated. The treatment for convergence insufficiency disorder is non-invasive, effective, and much of it can be done at home. Please help me get the word out.

-- Angie W. in Minnesota

**Dear Angie:** I am pleased to help you get the word out to other families whose children are struggling to learn. After reading your letter, I contacted my experts at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and was informed that this problem, where the eyes drift too much inward (or outward) in attempting to focus, can also be present in adults.



*Dear Abby*

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The symptoms can include eyestrain, headaches, blurred vision, sleepiness and trouble retaining information when reading. Other symptoms associated with convergence insufficiency include a "pulling" sensation around the eyes, the rubbing or closing of one eye when reading, words seeming to "jump" or "float" across the page, needing to reread the same line of words, frequent loss of place, inability to concentrate and short attention span.

The good news is: Vision exercises can fix the problem in most cases, some done at home and some performed in-office with a vision therapist. Prism glasses are another option; however, they are more often prescribed for adults with this disorder than for children.

For more information on “*Vision and Learning*” contact:



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