

Atropine
Eye ointment or drops

The Eye (Ophthalmology) Department
The Royal London Hospital



Introduction

Your child has a lazy eye and you have tried to make it work harder by using a patch over your child's 'good' eye but without success. Atropine eye ointment or atropine eye drops are another way of reducing vision in the good eye to encourage the poorer eye to work properly. It works well with many children but it is not without risk. This leaflet tells you about the risks and benefits, how to use atropine and it gives some useful contact numbers at the end. Please give your child information from this leaflet where appropriate.

Atropine eye ointment and drops

Atropine placed in your child's good eye will cause temporary enlargement (dilation) of the pupil and reduce the focussing ability of the eye. The result is blurred vision and the poorer eye is made to work harder to make up for the loss of clear sight in the normal eye. This effect is not permanent and vision in the good eye will return to normal once your child stops taking the atropine.

We usually find atropine has to be taken for at least two months to encourage the poorer eye to work properly and improve vision in the long term. During this time you will have to bring your child back to the Eye Department for regular eye checks.

Atropine can come in either a tube of ointment or a bottle of drops. We like you to try the ointment first but if you find placing this in your child's eye difficult you can switch to the drops. You will be given atropine to take away with you after your appointment here. We will let your GP know that we have prescribed atropine so you will be able to get your next supply from them.

Applying the atropine

- Wash your hands before and after applying the ointment or drops.
- Gently pull your child's lower eyelid downwards and place half an inch (one centimetre) of the ointment, or one drop of liquid, into the gap between the eyelid and the eye. Ask your child to blink a few times to spread the atropine in the eye.
- Note: to prevent infection it is important that the nozzle of the tube or bottle does not touch the eye.
- Your child may complain that the ointment or drops sting, but the irritation will stop after a few minutes.
- Some parents find it easier to put the ointment in their child's eye while the child is asleep.
- You will be told how often you will have to apply the atropine.

Storing atropine

Both the tube and the bottle of atropine are sterile until opened. Once atropine has been opened it should be used within 28 days. If there is still atropine left after it has passed its expiry date you must return it to us when you come for your next appointment so we can dispose of it here. Atropine should be stored in a cool, dry place away from bright light and out of children's reach.

The risks of atropine

Your child can become sensitive to bright light as atropine dilates the pupil so make sure they wear sunglasses if they find them helpful.

Other side effects of atropine are rare but if any of the following occur please stop using the atropine immediately and contact the Orthoptic Department. We will give you an appointment quickly to discuss alternative treatment methods.

- Bloodshot eyes
- Conjunctivitis
- Swelling of the eyelids
- Restlessness or hyperactivity
- Flushing and dry skin

If your child experiences severe pain, nausea, vomiting, or an irregular heart beat, stop using the atropine and go to your nearest hospital A&E department immediately. Please ring the Orthoptic Department to let them know what has happened and make an appointment to discuss another type of treatment.

Regular eye appointments

While your child is on atropine their eyes will have to be checked regularly about every four to six weeks. This is very important: we need to look at both eyes to make sure the treatment is working and that the good eye is coping well with the atropine. At each appointment we will ask you to book the next visit so you will always have an appointment time in your diary.

Stopping atropine

When your child stops taking atropine it can take up to two weeks for pupil size to return to normal.

Contact details

Ophthalmology Department

The Royal London Hospital
Whitechapel
London E1 1BB

www.bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk

General enquiries to the orthoptists:

020 7377 7000 ext. 2485 (office hours 9am–5pm)

To make or change an appointment:

Reception 020 7377 7000 ext. 2482
(office hours 9am–5pm)

In an emergency please go to your nearest
hospital A&E department.