

# Features

## Four types of eye disease make vision weaken

By RUTH GRAVES  
Battalion Reporter  
If you're an adult, there's a 5 percent chance your vision is far from perfect, says the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness.

The society uses the term "visual acuity," which means "If a person has a visual acuity of 20/50, this basically means that he can see clearly from 20 feet what a person with normal visual acuity can see clearly from 50 feet."

Simply how well a person sees. According to their estimate, five

percent of adults have a visual acuity of 20/50 or worse.

This scale of measurement does not indicate the vision a person has in each eye, as is commonly believed. Instead, if a person has a visual acuity of 20/50, this basically means that he can see clearly from 20 feet what a person with normal visual acuity can see clearly from 50 feet.

The main four problems causing poor visual acuity are: myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism and presbyopia, says Dr. James Smelley, a Houston ophthalmologist. All these are problems caused by faulty refraction, the process of light forming an image on the retina. Smelley explained these problems.

Myopia, or near-sightedness, occurs when light is refracted at a point inside the retina. In this situation, the eye is too long, so

the focal point occurs in front of the retina. If a person has normal vision, refraction will occur at the retina. Myopia is corrected with concave lenses, which bring the point of refraction backwards to the retina.

Hyperopia, or far-sightedness, occurs when light is refracted at a point behind the eye, as opposed to in front of it (which happens with myopia) or at the retina itself (which happens with normal vision). In the case of hyperopia, the eye is "too short, so the focus goes behind the retina." Hyperopia is corrected with convex lenses, which move the point of refraction forward to the retina.

Astigmatism occurs when there is distortion because the curvature of the eyeball is not consistent. Astigmatism of the eye may be basically myopic or hyperopic, depending on whether most of the

distorted refraction occurs in front of or behind the retina.

Presbyopia, a form of hyperopia, occurs in virtually everyone

**Public awareness of visual acuity has traditionally been low, with public school testing and drivers' license testing being the only two widespread programs of visual testing.**

to some degree once they reach middle age. Presbyopia occurs when "lens elasticity is lost and the eye is fixed on a constant point." This causes impairment of people's ability to see objects close

to their eyes. This is the most common problem causing poor visual acuity.

Public awareness of visual acuity has traditionally been low, with public school testing and drivers' license testing being the only two widespread programs of visual testing.

College Station Independent School District, for instance, tries to test every child in the school district every year, said school nurse Diane Chester, but usually only tests about 90 percent of the students. Because of absenteeism, some children slip by without being tested.

Chester said students are tested basically for near-sightedness (myopia) but are tested for far-sightedness (hyperopia) if a problem is suspected. Astigmatism can be detected while performing a test for myopia, she said, because astigmatism is indicated when students mistake letters in the test for other letters; for instance, children with astigmatism might confuse a C with an O or G.

If the visual acuity test shows a

problem, the student is retested. If the test result remains the same on the second testing, the child's parents are told he needs a professional eye examination.

Chester said in a grade level of approximately 240 children, she will usually "pull 30 that need to be retested and of those I usually refer between 10 and 12."

Bryan Independent School District has a similar testing program. However, high school nurse Margaret Cannon said high school students are not routinely checked for visual acuity because most problems are caught before a student reaches the high school level. However, new students who register at Bryan for the first time must either take a school eye test or furnish proof that they have had a professional eye examination, she said.

Although this type of visual testing for children is frequent, adults are only given mandatory eye tests when they renew their drivers' licenses. Besides being infrequent, this type of testing may not be comprehensive.

However, there has been recent publicity of an idea fostered by an ophthalmology professor at Stanford Medical School. Dr. Milton Flocks has devised a plan for self eye exams via television that he says could detect 90 percent of eye defects.

Flocks has been working with a \$30,000 grant from the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, and is in the final stages of testing his plan.

If implemented, Flocks' plan would include television eye tests with instructions for viewers. After each test, an explanation of the results would be given.

Because loss of visual acuity can be gradual, people may be unaware of the existence of their visual problems and might be missing out on being able to see well, said Smelley.

"If you even think you might have an acuity problem," Smelley said, "go ahead and have it checked. You never know what you might be missing out on seeing."

## One-room schoolhouse returns

United Press International  
DAVIS, Calif. — While many educators are working to get schools back to the fundamentals, 23 youngsters are in the ultimate back-to-basics experiment — a one-room schoolhouse.

They are the first-, second- and third-graders of Fairfield School, a red cinder block building in the tomato fields and pastures five miles west of Davis.

Davis is a future-minded city known for its progressive University of California campus. It seems an unlikely spot for a country schoolhouse — except that Fairfield School is more than a throwback to the past.

Its pupils could have attended classes elsewhere, but parents chose the country school because they believe small is better.

On Saturdays, they mow the lawn, wash the windows, mop the floor and make repairs to keep the school in business. Most expenses are paid by the 5,000-student Davis Unified School District and volunteer work accounts for the rest of the bill.

The youngsters work together in one room. Outside, they play on a neatly trimmed field that was four feet deep in weeds before parents decided they wanted a community school.

The name goes back to 1865, when Fairfield School was opened. It was rebuilt in 1910, and in 1969 it was moved to a new building on its present two-acre site.

Closed two years ago by budget cuts in the wake of property tax-cutting Proposition 13, the school was reopened this fall after parents told the board of education they could operate it for \$30,000 less than the estimated cost.

Parents have been performing daily and weekend chores ever since. During the week, they also volunteer as aides, crossing guards and playground supervisors, and serve hot lunches that are based from an elementary school a few miles away.

Some families raise crops, horses or cattle. Others work in Davis or Sacramento but like living on a few acres of their own in the country. A few parents are migrant farmworkers and their children are still learning to speak English.

Pierre Mauer, 7, says he prefers his one-room school to more modern buildings with all their libraries, audio-visual laboratories, lunchrooms and lots of classrooms.

"It's pretty nice here," Pierre says. "There's not so much noise, and cars aren't zooming by all the time. You know all the kids because it's not so crowded."

In Fairfield's multigraded classroom, children work at their own pace, are highly motivated and learn better, teachers and parents say.

The youngsters are too young to do heavy yard work, but they're good at picking up papers.

"They try to keep it neat around here," says Shirley Huddleson, a veteran teacher who attended a one-room school herself as a youngster.

"They know their parents are working around here and they don't mess things up like some kids do who don't feel any responsibility. They know their parents are going to get after them — it's a real family effort and there's a difference in attitude."

Eileen O'Farrell, a volunteer who hopes to send a daughter to

Fairfield next year, adds: "The secret to a child's success is having parents that care. And here, the parents are not only invited to care but told it's their turn."

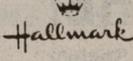
Would the Davis experiment work in the big city?  
O'Farrell thinks it would if pa-

rents became involved, although she recalls that New Yorkers who filmed Fairfield School for national television joked about a one-room school on every block. They also complained about the flies that stray in from nearby cow barns.

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