

# VISION

SEPTEMBER 2001

## Why Do Some Smart Children Have Trouble Learning?

When Tommy McLaughlin was in fourth grade in Queens, his parents went to a school Open House where the teacher told them that their son was having trouble keeping up with his classmates. The teacher seated Tommy in the front of the class, but he still could not copy the notes from the blackboard to his notebook. "His first few sentences were clear and then his writing became scribbling," said his mother Lynn. "He had As and Bs in math, social studies and science, but he was reading on a first grade level."

It wasn't that Tommy couldn't see the board, he simply couldn't make his hands do what his eyes saw.

Tommy's learning problem showed up as early as first grade when a teacher described his difficulty reading as "immaturity". In second grade, even after he got glasses, he still had a hard time following the printed word. He would skip words and lose his place on the page. "We just didn't know what the problem was. It was very frustrating for everyone," said his mother. Finally, the 10-year-old was referred by a teacher to the University Optometric Center's Learning Disabilities Unit during the summer after 4th grade.

Diagnostic testing revealed that Tommy had a specific learning disability primarily in the areas of visual motor and visual processing skills. This type of disability, independent of intelligence, caused Tommy to have significant reading and writing problems. He is one of nearly 4 million school age children who have some sort of learning disability.

Dr. Harold Friedman, Chief of the Center's Vision Therapy Service and a well-known author, consultant and lecturer in vision and learning, noted that Tommy had all the typical signs of a learning disability. His labored handwriting, confusion with letters and words and trouble copying assignments from the board to the paper, all indicated a problem with his visual motor and processing skills.

"What makes our program at the Center unique," explains Dr. Friedman, "is that our youngsters have a total vision work-up plus neuropsychological, perceptual and academic evaluations. What results is a complete picture of what may cause smart

kids to do poorly in school."

Working with Dr. Friedman, the team of psychologists, optometrists, and clinical researchers spent time with Tommy and his mother to design an individualized program to maximize his academic potential.

After the evaluation process, Tommy began a 45-minute vision therapy program once a week with a member of the Vision Therapy faculty and interns. He was exposed to a series of procedures, often on the computer, to develop his visual, motor and perceptual skills. After eight months, everyone saw a dramatic change. Today, Tommy's mother says he enjoys reading and does much better in school. She added that his confidence has reached new heights

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Tommy McLaughlin works with Dr. Harold Friedman during a vision therapy session while Tommy's mother, Lynn, watches.

# Ask the Doctor



Dr. Mitchell Dul  
Chairman, Dept. of Clinical Sciences  
Director, Glaucoma Institute

## Important Phone Numbers

**Adult Primary Care Service**  
212.780.0770/5032/4952

**Children With Special Needs**  
212.780.4996

**Clinical Administration**  
212.780.4930

**Contact Lens Unit**  
212.780.5030

**Head Trauma / Rehabilitation Unit**  
212.780.4956

**Homebound Vision Care Program**  
212.780.4930

**Infant's Vision Unit**  
212.780.4996

**Insurance Information**  
212.780.5949

**Learning Disabilities Unit**  
212.780.4990

**Low Vision Service**  
212.780.4956

**Ocular Disease & Special Testing**  
212.780.5020

**Ophthalmic Dispensary (Glasses)**  
212.780.5929

**Pediatric Vision Unit**  
212.780.4996

**The Glaucoma Institute**  
212.780.5020

**Vision Therapy Service**  
212.780.4960

**Vision Rehabilitation Unit**  
212.780.4960

## What is Glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a disease of the eye in which the optic nerve or nerve fibers are damaged, often as a result of abnormally high eye pressure. There is often a loss of side or peripheral vision. It is one of the leading causes of blindness and visual impairment.

## Who gets Glaucoma?

People over the age of 40 are most likely to get glaucoma and the risk increases with age. Other risk factors include ethnic origin (people of African heritage are 3 to 4 times more likely to develop glaucoma than Caucasians), family history, high eye pressure and possibly male gender.

## What are the Symptoms?

Glaucoma has been called the "sneak thief of sight" because there are no obvious symptoms until the disease progresses. There is generally no pain associated with glaucoma and central vision remains intact until the advanced stages of the disease.

## I've Been to a Glaucoma Screening, is that Enough?

Glaucoma screenings usually just check the eye pressure. Although high eye pressure is, indeed, a risk factor for the disease, between 35% and 40% of glaucoma patients in a population will be missed by a pressure reading alone. There is no one test to diagnose glaucoma. There is, however, an entire battery of diagnostic testing including assessment of the optic nerve and nerve fibers where the doctor looks through the patient's pupil which will help determine whether or not you have glaucoma.

You should have a complete eye examination every year if you are over 40.

If you have a question for one of our Doctors, please send it in writing to the Office of Institutional Advancement, SUNY College of Optometry, 33 W. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036



University Optometric Center



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# New Vision Rehabilitation Center To Help Stroke Victims

DR. ALDEN N. HAFFNER, PRESIDENT of the SUNY College of Optometry, recently announced the establishment the Raymond J. Greenwald Rehabilitation Center at the College. Mr. Greenwald gave a \$500,000 gift to create a new clinical, research and teaching unit to assist stroke patients and others with neurological and visual impairments.

"I am hopeful that great things will come from this center. How inspiring it is to see talented faculty conducting thrilling research projects and patient care innovations that will help so many people in the future," said Mr. Greenwald. According to President Haffner, this new multidisciplinary patient care service will include optometrists, ophthalmologists, social workers, and occupational therapists. "This is a very exciting step for optometry and for our patient care facility, the University Optometric Center. Our hope is to create a successful model for rehabilitation that builds upon the already advanced forms of vision therapy rehabilitation in neurologically impaired patients with visual disorders. The interdisciplinary character is a major feature of this new center. A director will be named in the fall." said Dr. Haffner.

Mr. Greenwald is a successful New York City realtor and Broadway co-producer of *The Best Man*, a recent hit by Gore Vidal and *A Thousand Clowns*, starring Tom Selleck, currently running on Broadway.

ABOVE: At the luncheon marking the establishment of the Raymond J. Greenwald Rehabilitation Center was (L to R) Dr. Alden N. Haffner, President, SUNY College of Optometry; Dr. Mitchell Dul, Chief, Clinical Sciences; Mr Greenwald, and Ms. Pearl Berman.



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and his eye-hand coordination has improved so much that he has joined the local baseball team for the first time.

The Learning Disabilities Unit at the University Optometric Center has had a long and distinguished record of achievement. Over the past 27 years, thousands of children and adults have received vision therapy and remediation to help them reach their greatest learning potential.

If you would like more information about the Learning Disabilities Unit, call 212.780.4990.



## For Parents & Teachers

### KIDS, VISION AND SCHOOL

This fall, 45 million elementary school children will pack their knapsacks and head back to school. According to the American Optometric Association, nearly one out of four children has a vision problem. Vision related learning problems invade all social classes. Some visual problems related to learning are often mistaken for low motivation, rebelliousness, short attention span or unwillingness to study. Often these problems can be symptomatic of an underlying visual or perceptual problem.

If you notice one or more symptoms with your child, you should schedule a complete vision examination by calling the University Optometric Center. If your child needs further testing, he or she may be referred to the Center's Vision Therapy or Learning Disabilities Unit.

Here are signs that both parents and teachers should look for that may indicate visual problems in a child.

- Trips or stumbles frequently
- One eye turns in or out at any time
- Has short visual and listening attention span, becomes easily bored
- Suffers from motion sickness
- Complains of seeing double
- Loses place easily when reading
- Omits letters, numbers or phrases when reading
- Headaches, burning or itching eyes after reading
- Covers or closes one eye when reading

## Participating Insurance Programs

Aetna	Medicaid
Centercare	Medicare
Cigna	NVA
Davis Vision	Oxford
Empire Blue Cross/Shield	PHS
Empire Plan	United Healthcare
Guildnet	US Healthcare
GHI	Visiting Nurse Services
Healthnet	VSP
HIP of New York	

If you do not see your plan listed, ask the operator when to schedule your appointment.  
Telephone: 212.780.4950

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## What's Inside...

- Back-to-School Article for Parents
- Questions about Glaucoma
- New Vision Rehab Center

### HOW TO GET TO THE UNIVERSITY OPTOMETRIC CENTER

33 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036 (between 5th and 6th Avenues)

**SUBWAY:** The IND line (B, D, Q, and F) stops across the street at 42nd St and 6th Ave. The Flushing line (7 train) stops at 42nd and 5th Ave. The IRT (1 and 9) stops one block west of the Times Square Station. The IRT (4, 5, and 6) stop two blocks east at Grand Central.

**BUSES:** MTA buses: M42 and M104 stop half a block away.

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The logo for 'VISION' features the word in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'V' is white and set against a green square background. The remaining letters 'ISION' are green. Above the 'I' and 'O' are three short, vertical green lines.

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