

More time indoors damaging health in Europe

The European Society of Ophthalmology and the International Myopia Institute have published an open access report in the European Journal of Ophthalmology on the growing prevalence of myopia in Europe and possibilities for its prevention:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1120672121998960>

The key messages from the report are:

- Myopia is growing at an alarming rate, with 4.9 billion people expected to have myopia by 2050 worldwide, posing a considerable challenge for health systems. This means that pathological myopia is predicted to become the most common cause of irreversible vision impairment and blindness, unless preventive interventions are taken.
- In Europe, the prevalence of myopia has increased to almost 50% in the 25-29 year age group.
- Children over the age of 6 were found to be particularly at risk, with the highest rate of onset of myopia currently observed in children 7-10 years old. The European Society of Ophthalmology provided advice for children and their parents on managing the risks (see below).
- Across the region, the overall prevalence of myopia was found to be high:
 - Western Europe: 36.7%
 - Central Europe: 34.6%
 - Eastern Europe: 32.2%
- Increased time spent indoor was identified as the leading factor for the increase of Myopia. Every additional hour of outdoor time per week was found to lead to a reduction in the risk of myopia by 2%.
- Other factors such as the use of computers and smartphones, location of residency (urban vs rural), ethnicity, gender, education and socioeconomic factors were also found to be possible contributing factors to the increase in Myopia.

Advice for children and their parents:

1. Spend more time outdoors.

2. Takes regular breaks from time spent looking at screens or other devices (and other near work)(every 45 minutes) and read at an appropriate distance (30 cm).
3. Work in a bright environment, and where possible, work in conditions with natural light.
4. And most importantly, before your child starts school, make sure they visit an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Advice for eye care specialists (optometrists / ophthalmologists):

1. Before a child starts school, a comprehensive eye examination with cycloplegia should be done to evaluate refractive error and binocular integrity.
2. Pre-myopic patients should be monitored by an eye care specialist regularly.
3. Determine the children at risk of progression and select the intervention that is most appropriate for the child, their parents, and their eye care specialist to slow the progression.
4. Ensure that children have a perfectly corrected distance vision.
5. Draw attention to the importance of outdoor activity and the importance of bright light and of taking breaks from near work/screen time.