

students with optic neuritis

What is optic neuritis?

Optic neuritis is inflammation of the optic nerve—the nerve that carries visual information from the retina to the brain. This condition usually causes sudden vision problems such as blurred vision, dim or dull color perception, a central blind spot, or even vision loss, most often in one eye. It is rare for both eyes to be affected at the same time. Students may experience eye pain that feels dull, aching, or sharp, especially with eye movement. Vision loss typically worsens over a few days and gradually improves within 4 to 12 weeks. Some students may take up to 8 to 10 months to fully recover, while others may not regain full vision. In rare cases, permanent vision loss can occur. Because optic neuritis affects the optic nerve and not the shape of the eye, prescription glasses cannot correct the vision problems. The condition is not contagious and is caused by inflammation. In some cases, it may be an early sign of multiple sclerosis.

How can optic neuritis affect a student at school?

Children may struggle in the following areas:

- **Physical:** eye pain with movement (seen in over 90% of cases), sore or tender eye, mild to severe central vision loss, dim or dull vision, reduced color perception, decreased peripheral vision, a central blind spot, headaches, nausea, worsened vision after exercise, hot showers, or heat exposure (which may persist even after vision improves), seeing flashing lights even with eyes closed

How can schools support students with optic neuritis?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Assess for **assistive technology** and visual support tools.
- Provide **enlarged printed notes** or allow use of a recording device.
- Offer **audio versions** of reading materials or enlarge written content.
- Allow use of an **eye patch** (if recommended by a physician) during reading or screen time.
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.

Social and Emotional

- Provide **staff training** and share relevant information about the condition.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.
- Assign a **trusted adult** as a point of contact for concerns.
- Maintain **frequent communication** between the student, family, school nurse, and medical team.

Physical

- Permit **rest breaks** or shortened school days as needed.
- Allow **participation in school activities** with appropriate limitations.

- Avoid **extreme heat** and activities that raise body temperature.
- Offer **preferential seating**.
- Offer **unrestricted clinic/nurse passes**.

More Resources

- **American Academy of Ophthalmology**
aao.org/
- **Mayo Clinic - Optic neuritis**
mayoclinic.org

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit childrens.com/school-services

