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Understanding *Myopia*

A compilation of facts about Shortsightedness
for pediatricians, parents, educators & policy makers.

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UNDERSTANDING MYOPIA:

A compilation of facts about Shortsightedness for pediatricians, parents, educators & policy makers.

October 2024

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Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge these studies and articles in helping us compile this document.

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Introduction

Myopia, or shortsightedness, is a condition that affects millions of people worldwide, yet it remains widely misunderstood. As ophthalmologists, we have witnessed firsthand the challenges myopia presents to patients of all ages. We hope that this book serves as a comprehensive guide, offering clear and practical information to help individuals and families manage myopia effectively.

This is the compilation of the most recent scientific knowledge available on Myopia. Whether you are a parent concerned about your child's vision, an educator seeking to support students, or someone living with myopia, this book is designed to provide you with the tools and knowledge you need.

Table of *Contents*

Chapter 1

Understanding Myopia

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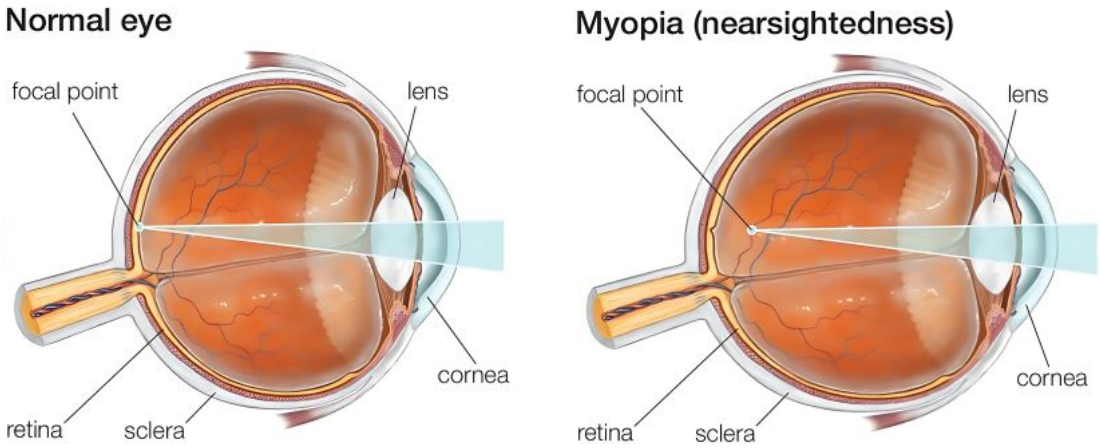
What is Myopia?

- Myopia, or shortsightedness, is a vision condition where distant objects appear blurred, while close objects are seen clearly.
- It occurs because light entering the eye focuses in front of the retina, rather than directly on it, causing blurred vision for distant objects.
- The retina, located at the back of the eye, captures light and sends visual signals to the brain. Improper focus in front of the retina results in a blurred image.
- Uncorrected myopia is the leading cause of distance vision impairment globally and a common cause of correctable vision loss.
- Research has been ongoing for decades to understand the development and progression of myopia on a global scale.



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What is the extent of the problem?

- Myopia is more than a minor inconvenience; if left uncorrected, it can affect daily activities, academic performance, and work.
- Severe cases of myopia increase the risk of serious eye conditions, including Retinal detachment, Glaucoma, Cataracts
- Myopia is a frequent cause of vision impairment and blindness, particularly in regions like East Asia and Europe, where myopic macular degeneration is prevalent.
- Associated complications also include amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (misalignment of the eyes), which can lead to significant deterioration of vision.

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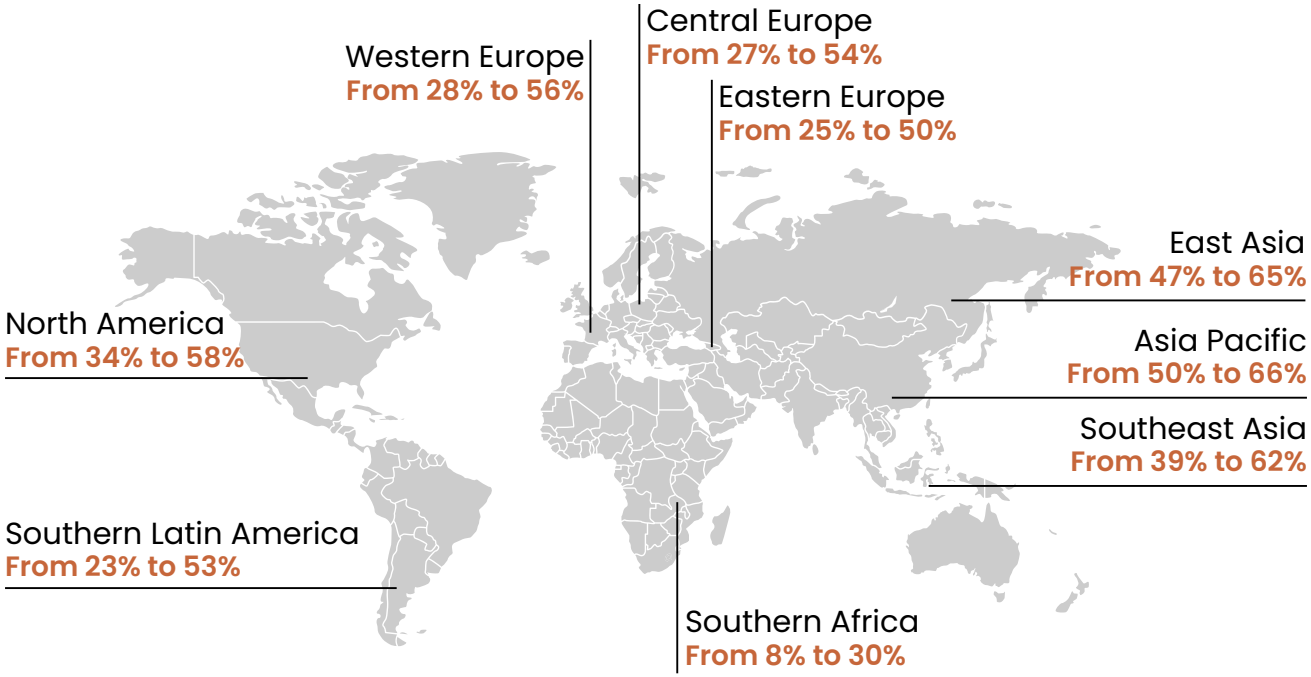
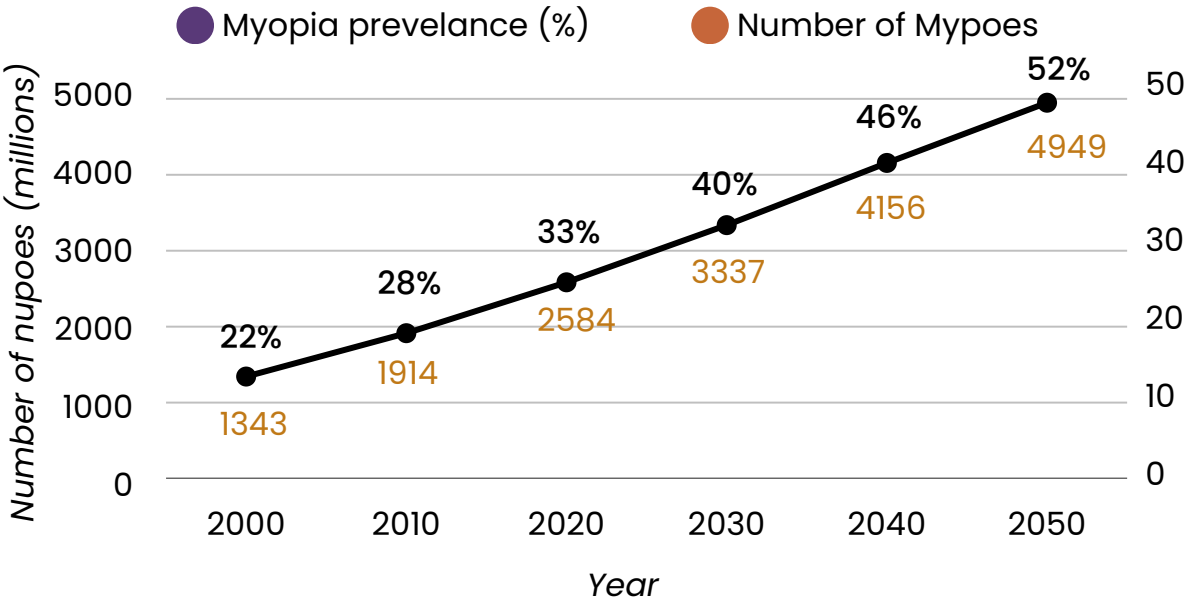
Prevalence:

- In countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, China, and Japan, myopia rates range from 80 to 90%.
- The prevalence in the USA has nearly doubled over the past three decades, now affecting 42% of the population.
- In India, community-based studies show a prevalence of 4-10%, with school-based studies reporting 10-20%.



Myopia is one of the most common visual impairments worldwide. Current estimates suggest that approximately 30% of the global population is affected by myopia. By 2050, it is projected that nearly 50% of the global population—about 5 billion people—will be myopic.

Myopia: Now and in 2050



Symptoms of Myopia

Myopia typically manifests through a variety of symptoms that can affect both children and adults. Common signs include:

- **Blurred Vision:** Objects in the distance, such as road signs or the television, appear blurred.
- **Squinting:** People may squeeze their eyes to see distant objects more clearly, which temporarily improves focus.

- **Eyestrain:** Prolonged efforts to focus on distant objects can cause discomfort, fatigue, or headaches, especially when driving or reading.
- **Difficulty Seeing at Night:** Myopia can make it harder to see clearly in low light, particularly while driving at night.
- **Frequent Headaches or Eye Pain:** Persistent discomfort can indicate that vision is not sharp, especially in children.
- **Holding Objects Close:** Holding books or devices very close can be a sign of shortsightedness.
- **Difficulty Concentrating:** Poor vision may lead to trouble focusing on tasks, especially in children and can manifest as academic problems.

Types of Myopia

Myopia can be categorized into three main types, based on the degree of shortsightedness and any associated structural changes in the eye:

- **Low Myopia:** Less than -6 diopters (D), this is the most common form.
- **High Myopia:** Greater than -6 diopters (D), this type increases the risk of serious conditions like retinal detachment, glaucoma, or cataracts.
- **Pathological Myopia:** A severe form where excessive elongation of the eyeball leads to structural changes in the retina, heightening the risk of complications such as myopic maculopathy and vision loss. Close monitoring and intensive management are crucial.

Understanding the type of myopia you have is crucial for determining the appropriate treatment and management strategies.

Chapter 2

Causes and Risk Factors of Myopia

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Genetic Factors

Hereditary Influence:
Myopia is often inherited. Children of myopic parents are at a higher risk of developing the condition. Specific genes influence eye structure, including the shape of the eyeball and corneal curvature, both of which contribute to the development of myopia.
While genetics contribute to myopia, other external factors also play a key role.

Environmental Factors

Lifestyle changes, particularly in modern urban environments, have contributed to the rise in myopia. Key factors include:

- **Near Work:** Prolonged activities that involve focusing on close objects (e.g., reading, screen use) increase the risk of myopia by straining the eyes. Near work done for long periods, especially without breaks, heightens this risk.
- **Screen Time:** Increased use of digital screens for work, study, and entertainment leads to prolonged near work. It is unfortunate that parents and caretakers in this era use digital screen to even feed infants. This practice is not recommended.
- **Age of Onset:** Early onset of myopia (ages 6-7) carries a 6.6 times higher risk of progressing to severe myopia compared to later onset (around 11 years).

- **Lack of Outdoor Time:** Spending insufficient time outdoors is a key environmental risk factor. Natural light and focusing on distant objects help regulate eye growth and prevent elongation. Studies suggest that children who spend more time outdoors, particularly 2 hours or more daily, have a reduced risk of developing myopia.
- **Ethnicity:** People of Asian descent are observed to have a higher risk of faster myopia progression, though more research is needed to confirm this link.

Biological Factors

Biological factors interact with both genetic and environmental influences to affect the development and progression of myopia:

- **Eye Growth:** Myopia occurs when the eyeball grows too long, causing light to focus in front of the retina rather than directly on it. This elongation can be influenced by rapid eye growth during childhood and adolescence. Both genetic predisposition and environmental factors like near work and reduced outdoor time contribute to this process.
- **Corneal and Lens Curvature:** Variations in the curvature of the cornea or lens can cause light to focus incorrectly, contributing to myopia. These structural characteristics can be influenced by genetics, but environmental factors also play a role in how these features develop during childhood and adolescence.

Myopia is rarely caused by one factor alone. Instead, it often results from the interaction between genetic predisposition and lifestyle choices.


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Chapter 3

Diagnosing Myopia

Detecting Pre-Myopia

Pre-myopia is the early stage where the refractive error indicates a potential risk for developing full myopia. Detecting pre-myopia allows for early intervention, which may slow progression. Routine eye checkups between the ages of 6 and 11 every year will help your ophthalmologist diagnose pre-myopia and alert you to take precautionary lifestyle modification measures.

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Steps of our Myopia Control Clinical Pathway

Evaluation by the Optometrist

Examination by Pediatric Ophthalmologist

Advanced test for eye measurement (Biometry)

Guidance for lifestyle change & treatment for myopia control

Guidance to help purchase the right frame & lenses

Regular follow-up with the team

Monitoring and Follow-up

- **For myopic children:** Scheduling eye exams annually, or even more frequently if pre-myopia or myopia is detected, ensures that any changes in vision are identified early.
- **For myopic adults:** Regular eye checks are important, particularly for those with high myopia or those experiencing changes in vision. This will help your ophthalmologist in early diagnosis of complications of high myopia like retinal detachment and glaucoma.

Why are regular eye checks important?

1. Children may develop refractive errors at any age and will need prompt correction with glasses; if not treated it may lead to irreversible loss of vision.
2. 80% of a child's overall development, especially in infancy, is dependent on vision. If vision problems are not detected early and corrected, it will cause a delay in all milestones.
3. Good vision is required for reading, writing and other classroom activities. Academic performance may be affected if vision is not clear.
4. The child may develop low self-esteem and appear inattentive or uninterested when vision is not clear. This may be mistaken for behavioral issues.

Chapter 4

Myopia Treatment Options

Eyeglasses and Contact Lenses

Corrective lenses are the most common treatment for myopia. Both eyeglasses and contact lenses refocus light onto the retina to provide clear vision.

- **Eyeglasses:** A simple and safe option for correcting myopia. Eyeglasses can be customized with lens coatings, such as anti-reflective and blue light filters, to improve comfort and protection.
- **Contact Lenses:** Ideal for those who prefer a glasses-free appearance or have an active lifestyle.

Myth: Wearing glasses or contacts will make myopia worse, and you'll become dependent on them.
Truth: Corrective lenses do not worsen myopia, nor do they make your eyes "dependent" on them. Any changes in prescription reflect the natural progression of myopia, not lens use.
Myth: Contact lenses are unsafe and often lead to infections.
Truth: Contact lenses are safe when proper hygiene is followed. Most infections are caused by improper care, such as not cleaning the lenses properly or wearing them for too long.
Myth: Eating carrots will reduce your eyeglass prescription.
Truth: While diet, including carrots, doesn't directly influence your eyeglass power, carrots are rich in nutrients that promote overall eye health and contribute to general well-being.

Scan the QR Code to learn more about using contact lens safely

Orthokeratology (Ortho-K)

Ortho-K lenses are worn overnight to temporarily reshape the cornea, providing clear vision during the day without the need for glasses or contact lenses.

- **How It Works:** The lenses reshape the cornea while you sleep, offering clear vision the next day.
- **Benefits:** Effective in slowing myopia progression in children and teenagers. Suitable for athletes or those who prefer a glasses-free look.
- **Considerations:** Good hygiene is critical to avoid infections. Regular check-ups are needed to ensure the lenses fit well and maintain eye health.

Refractive Surgery (only for 18yrs and above)

Refractive surgery offers a permanent solution by reshaping the cornea with laser technology.

- **LASIK:** A flap is created in the cornea, and the tissue underneath is reshaped or flapless smile LASIK (which is the most advanced technique) Quick recovery and a popular choice for long-term correction.
- **PRK:** The outer layer of the cornea is removed, and the underlying tissue is reshaped. Ideal for those with thinner corneas.

Note: Surgery should only be performed after myopia stabilizes. Consult a specialist to discuss risks like dry eyes and glare.

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Role of Vision Therapy in Myopia

Myopia can be found in one eye only and the parents and the child may not be aware because the other eye is seeing well. Loss of vision in one eye will result in amblyopia (the medical term for lazy eye). Early treatment ensures proper brain-eye connection development, preventing irreversible vision loss or lazy eye.

Vision therapy plays a vital role in treating lazy eye. By doing various exercises we try and stimulate the brain cells to start coordinating and sending signals to the weaker eye.

Hence Vision Therapy enhances

- Vision
- Depth Perception or 3D vision
- Eye hand coordination

Chapter 5

Prevention of Myopia Progression

Lifestyle Changes - Role of Outdoor Time in myopia

1. Myopia prevalence varies between 25–30% in urban areas and only 4–8% in rural areas, proving the impact of lifestyle and environment on eye health.
2. If a child spends at least two hours outdoors daily, it can help lower the risk of myopia by exposing them to natural light and allowing them to focus on distant objects.
3. Outdoor light levels are 8–10 times higher than indoor lighting which also helps in myopia control.
4. Studies suggest that bright light exposure may release dopamine in the retina, offering additional protective effects against myopia.

Lifestyle Changes

- **Limit Screen Time:** Reducing screen time is essential in preventing eye strain and slowing myopia progression. A helpful guideline is the "20-20-20 rule"—every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Parents or caretakers should also model healthy screen habits to set a positive example for children.
- **Healthy Reading Practices:** Encourage children to maintain a proper reading distance of at least 30-40 cm and ensure well-lit environments to minimize eye strain during close-up tasks.
- **Healthy Eating Habits:** A balanced diet rich in vitamins A, C, and E, along with omega-3 fatty acids, can support eye health. Incorporating leafy greens, colorful vegetables, and fruits, as well as nuts and seeds, promotes better vision and overall eye function.

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Do not get into the bus

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s of Myopia (Short sightedness)

Chapter 6

Impact of Myopia on Quality of Life

Educational Impact

Myopia can have a significant effect on educational outcomes, particularly in children and adolescents. For students, clear vision is essential for learning, as much of their schoolwork involves visual tasks like reading, writing, and viewing presentations. Uncorrected myopia can lead to several challenges:

- **Difficulty Seeing the Board:** Children with myopia may struggle to see the board clearly, leading to missed information during lessons. This can affect their ability to follow along in class and grasp key concepts.
- **Reading and Writing Challenges:** Myopia can make it difficult for students to read textbooks, handouts, and digital screens from a typical reading distance. As a result, they may hold reading materials too close to their eyes, leading to eye strain and discomfort.
- **Decreased Academic Performance:** The visual challenges associated with myopia can contribute to reduced academic performance. Children who cannot see clearly may become frustrated, lose interest in learning, or struggle to keep up with their peers. Emotionally, this can affect their self-confidence and social engagement.

Early detection and treatment of myopia through corrective lenses or other options significantly improve a child's ability to succeed in school and feel confident in learning.

Workplace Implications

For adults, myopia can influence career choices and workplace performance. Certain professions require excellent distance vision, such as pilots, military personnel, and professional drivers. Myopia may limit access to these careers or require corrective measures to meet visual standards. In the modern workplace, many jobs involve prolonged use of computers and digital devices, which can exacerbate myopia-related eye strain. Employees with uncorrected or poorly managed myopia may experience:

- Decreased Productivity: Blurred vision and eye discomfort can lead to decreased focus and productivity, particularly in visually demanding tasks such as healthcare, teaching, or manual labor that involves precise vision.
- Increased Absenteeism: Frequent headaches, eye strain, and the need for eye care appointments can result in missed workdays.

Employers can support employees with myopia by promoting eye health awareness, providing ergonomic workstations, and encouraging regular eye exams. Providing access to affordable eye care and insurance coverage for treatments can also mitigate workplace impacts.

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Economic Burden

The economic impact of myopia is significant for both individuals and society. The costs associated with myopia include:

- Corrective Lenses: The ongoing need for glasses or contact lenses can be expensive, particularly for individuals whose prescriptions change frequently or who require specialized lenses.
- Medical Treatments: Treatments like orthokeratology, atropine drops, or refractive surgery involve additional costs that may not be fully covered by insurance.
- Long-Term Complications: High myopia increases the risk of serious eye conditions, such as retinal detachment and macular degeneration, which can lead to costly surgical procedures and long-term care.
- Lost Productivity: The indirect costs of myopia include reduced productivity due to vision-related issues, absenteeism, and the potential need for career changes due to visual limitations.

On a broader scale, the increasing prevalence of myopia worldwide represents a significant public health challenge, with long-term implications for healthcare systems and economies. Addressing myopia early and comprehensively can help reduce its economic burden in the future.

Chapter 7

Recent Research & Future Directions

Advancements in Myopia Control

In recent years, significant progress has been made in understanding and controlling myopia. Researchers have explored various interventions aimed at slowing the progression of myopia, particularly in children. Some of the most promising developments include:

- **Low-Dose Atropine Eye Drops:** Low-dose atropine has emerged as a highly effective treatment for slowing myopia progression in children. Studies have shown that atropine eye drops can reduce the rate of myopia progression by up to 60%, with minimal side effects. Ongoing research aims to optimize dosage and treatment duration to achieve the best outcomes.
- **Orthokeratology (Ortho-K):** Ortho-K continues to gain popularity as a non-surgical method for managing myopia. Recent studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in both correcting myopia and reducing the risk of myopia progression in children. Advances in lens design and materials have improved the comfort and safety of Ortho-K lenses.
- **Special Contact Lenses & Spectacles:** New types of contact lenses, such as multifocal and dual-focus lenses, & special spectacles like DIMS/ HALT have been developed to create peripheral defocus, which slows the elongation of the eyeball. These lenses offer a convenient option for myopia control, particularly in children who may not be candidates for Ortho-K or atropine treatments.

Genetic Research

Understanding the genetic factors that contribute to myopia is a key area of ongoing research. Scientists have identified several genes associated with eye growth and refractive error, providing insights into the heritability of myopia. This research holds the potential to develop predictive tools that identify individuals at high risk for myopia early in life, allowing for targeted interventions.

Technological Innovations

Advances in imaging technology, such as optical coherence tomography (OCT), have enhanced our ability to monitor the structural changes in the eye associated with myopia. These technologies allow for more precise measurement of the retina, cornea, and overall eye shape, leading to better diagnosis and management of myopia.
In addition, the development of smartphone apps and wearable devices has made it easier for individuals to monitor their eye health and engage in myopia prevention strategies. These tools can track screen time, remind users to take breaks, and encourage outdoor activities, all of which are important for managing myopia.

Public Health Initiatives

Recognizing the growing burden of myopia, public health initiatives are being implemented worldwide to address the issue. These initiatives include:

- **Vision Screening Programs:** Many countries are expanding school-based vision screening programs to ensure early detection and treatment of myopia.

- **Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Public health campaigns are raising awareness about the importance of outdoor activity, limiting screen time, and regular eye exams. These efforts aim to educate parents, educators, and the general public about the risks of myopia and the steps that can be taken to mitigate them.
- **Policy Development:** Governments and health organizations are working to develop policies that support myopia prevention and management. This includes funding research, improving access to eye care services, and promoting healthy visual environments in schools and communities.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, the future of myopia management will likely involve a combination of genetic, environmental, and technological approaches. Personalized treatment plans based on an individual's genetic risk factors, lifestyle, and eye structure could become the norm. Additionally, continued research into the underlying mechanisms of myopia will pave the way for new and more effective treatments.

Chapter 8

Taking Control of Myopia

Empowering Your Vision

Myopia is more than just a vision issue—it's a challenge that, if left unmanaged, can impact every aspect of life. However, the journey through this book has shown that myopia is a condition that can be understood, managed, and even prevented to a significant degree. Empowering yourself with knowledge and taking proactive steps are key to managing this condition effectively.
From understanding the causes and symptoms to exploring treatment options and preventive strategies, you've gained valuable insights into how myopia can be controlled. This empowerment doesn’t stop with knowledge—it extends to action.

What You Can Do

Managing myopia is an ongoing process that requires commitment, but the benefits—clear vision, improved quality of life, and a reduced risk of complications—are well worth the effort. Here are the actionable steps you can take:

- **Prioritize Regular Eye Examinations:** Make eye health a priority by scheduling regular eye exams for yourself and your family. Early detection is critical to managing myopia effectively and preventing its progression.
- **Incorporate Outdoor Time:** Encourage outdoor activities, especially for children. Spending at least two hours a day outdoors has been shown to reduce the risk of developing myopia and slow its progression.
- **Adopt Healthy Screen Habits:** Limit screen time, particularly for young children, and practice the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break to look at something 20 feet away. This simple practice can reduce eye strain and protect your vision.
- **Consider All Treatment Options:** Explore the various treatment options discussed in this book, including corrective lenses, orthokeratology, atropine drops, and refractive surgery. Consult with an eye care professional to determine the best approach for your specific needs.
- **Stay Informed and Involved:** Keep up with the latest research and developments in myopia management. Engage with support groups, educational resources, and public health initiatives that promote eye health.

A Vision for the Future

The future of myopia management is bright, with ongoing research and technological advancements promising new ways to control and prevent the condition. By staying informed and taking proactive steps, you can protect your vision and that of your loved ones.

This book is just the beginning of your journey to better eye health. Whether you're a parent, educator, healthcare provider, or someone living with myopia, you have the power to take control of this condition and ensure that myopia doesn't limit your potential.

Myopia is a challenge, but it can be met with knowledge, action, and commitment. As you move forward, remember that your vision is not just a physical sense—it's a gateway to experiencing the world fully. By taking control of myopia, you're not just improving your eyesight; you're empowering yourself to live a fuller, richer life.

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Please scan this QR Code to listen to our podcast about Myopia Progression Control

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Microsurgical Eye Centre

Zamindar Microsurgical Eye Centre (ZMEC), an NABH-accredited tertiary eye care centre located in Bangalore, has been a trusted name in eye care since its establishment in 1997. ZMEC has built a reputation for delivering best-in-class eye care services, ensuring personalized healthcare with a wide range of surgical and medical expertise.

ZMEC's commitment to quality is encapsulated in its motto, "*Quality is not an accident but a result of intelligent efforts*", reflecting its dedication to excellence in every aspect of care. Known for its impressive success rate of 99.9% in cataract surgeries, ZMEC stands as one of the top eye hospitals in Bangalore, continuously striving to enhance the vision and eye health of children and adults alike.

We are recipients of Health Care Excellence Award by AHPI in 2022 in the Patient-Friendly Hospital Category.

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Join us in our Mission

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated ophthalmologists, optometrists, and support team, who work tirelessly to improve children's vision at our specialized pediatric eye hospital. Our comprehensive eye screenings and outreach programs in schools and slums aims at early detection and treatment of childhood blindness.

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ZMEC 3

Speciality Eye Care Centre

Kalyan Nagar

+91 97311 98857 or 080 4168 6676

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Let's join hands to fight myopia & create
a brighter tomorrow for our children.