

School Guide for Students with Optic Neuritis

What is Optic Neuritis ?

Optic Neuritis is inflammation of the optic nerve—the nerve that transmits light and visual images from the retina to the brain. Optic neuritis usually causes acute blurring of vision, graying of colors, loss of vision, or a blind spot, most commonly in one eye. It is rare that both eyes are affected at the same time. It is often painful and the student may feel dull and aching, pressure-like, or sharp and piercing in the eye. Loss of vision usually reaches its maximum extent in a few days, and generally improves within 4 to 12 weeks. For some, a complete recovery may take up to 8 to 10 months. Others may never recover, and a rare few could go blind. Because the visual changes that occur with optic neuritis are the result of inflammation of the optic nerve rather than changes in the shape of the eye, prescription glasses cannot correct the problems.

Optic neuritis is not contagious. It is caused by inflammation, and might indicate a future diagnosis of multiple sclerosis.

How can optic neuritis affect School Performance?

All of the following symptoms may not occur in all cases; however, they are the most common problems associated with optic neuritis.

- Pain with eye movement (more than 90% of patients)
- Tender, sore eye
- Mild to severe decrease in central vision
- Dull, dim vision
- Reduced color perception
- Decreased peripheral vision
- Central blind spot
- Headache
- Nausea
- Decreased vision following exercise, hot bath or shower, or extreme heat (This symptom may persist long term following recovery of vision.)
- Flashing lights (even with eyelid closed)

How can schools assist students with optic neuritis?

Each of the following should be individualized to meet the student's needs.

Academic:

- Start academic interventions right away for Section 504 or IDEA for Other Health Impairment
- Assess for assistive technology as soon as possible
- May need visual assessment for visual devices
- Provide a hard copy (enlarged) of notes prior to class or record class lecture
- Have reading assignments on tape or enlarge written material
- Have student wear an eye patch when reading or on the computer to relieve symptoms

Social/ Emotional

- Provide information on optic neuritis to any staff involved with the student
- Provide counseling to address any social and emotional stress
- Select a support person to address any concerns that may arise
- Frequent communication among student, parents, school nurse and medical team

Physical

- Incorporate rest period in student's schedule the first 4 weeks of illness
- Student may be involved in school activities, but with possible limitations (i.e. preferential seating, low stadium seating)
- Preferential seating
- Consider student's needs when giving tests and projects
- When necessary, avoid activities that elevate body temperature
- Avoid extreme heat
- Permanent nurse pass

Resources

www.mayoclinic.com/health/optic-neuritis/DS00882 www.myelitis.org/optic_neuritis.htm
www.mult-sclerosis.org/opticneuritis.html

School Services Department

Children's Health
Children's Medical Center
Dallas Campus: 214-456-7733
Plano Campus: 469-303-4670