**Happy reading, healthy eyes!**

The theme for this year's Children's Book Week is 'xxx!'. This reading promotion campaign aims to inspire many children to start reading and read more. We all know that reading is good for children. It is an essential skill that not only helps them in their school performance but also in their personal development. Reading increases children's language skills, stimulates creativity and imagination, and promotes critical thinking. Additionally, it is also a lot of fun! Enjoy disappearing into another world with your favorite exciting, funny, or adventurous book.

However, looking up close for a long time can contribute to myopia (nearsightedness). To ensure that your little bookworm keeps healthy eyes, it is important to know what myopia is and how you can prevent it.

**What is myopia?**

When you look at something, your eyes have to adjust. This means that the muscles around your eye lens tense or relax. This makes your eye lens rounder or less round, which changes the strength of your eye lens. When the muscles relax, the eye lens becomes flatter and you can see clearly at a distance. When the muscles tense, the lens becomes rounder and you can see clearly up close.

When you look at something close to your eye for a long time, the muscles have to tense all the time to make the lens rounder. To be less tense, the eyeball becomes a little longer. The muscles in your lens therefore have to work less hard to get a sharp image. Unfortunately, this means that you see less clearly from far away! With myopia, your eye has become longer. The higher your minus strength, the longer your eye has grown. In order to see clearly, you have to wear glasses with a minus strength.

**How bad is myopia?**

If the eyeball becomes longer than 26 millimeters (normal: 23 mm), this can cause problems later in life. Research shows that a high minus strength (-6 and above) in childhood increases the risk of developing severe visual impairment later in life. This is usually caused by myopic macular degeneration, but the risk of retinal detachment, early cataracts and glaucoma is also increased in high myopia. There are now even indications that people with mild myopia (from -2) already have an increased risk of eye diseases.

**How to prevent myopia?**

To prevent myopia, it's important for your child to take regular breaks while reading. Every 20 minutes, they should look into the distance for 20 seconds to allow their eyes to relax. You can use a timer to remind them. Additionally, ensure that your child spends at least 2 hours outdoors every day, which can include activities like walking or cycling to school and taking breaks at school. These guidelines are known as the 20-20-2 rules.

It's important to note that myopia may not always be preventable, as genetics also play a role. Children with short-sighted parents should especially adhere to the 20-20-2 rules to help prevent myopia.