Myopia, or nearsightedness, is an eye disease that causes poor long-distance vision. In myopic eyes, the eyeball is either longer than normal, or the cornea is too curved, both causing some images to be blurry.

Evidence shows that myopia is hereditary, or at least the tendency to develop myopia. If one or both parents are nearsighted, there is an increased chance their children will be nearsighted.

Environmental risk factors include time spent doing close work, such as computer work or reading, increased screen time and not spending enough time outdoors also plays a role in the development of myopia.

Vision problems can be subtle, especially in children. Myopia usually develops in childhood, so observe whether your child sits too close to the television, has frequent headaches, squints to read and rubs their eyes. Worsening school or athletic performance, or withdrawal from those activities, could indicate a vision problem.

Myopia is categorized as mild, moderate or high severity, depending on the amount of correction needed. The term high myopia generally used to describe nearsightedness of -5.00 to -6.00 D or higher. People with high myopia have an increased risk of retinal detachment, cataracts, myopic degeneration, and glaucoma.

Traditional glasses and contact lenses can help children to see more clearly but do not slow down the progression of myopia. Today, the FDA has approved soft contacts to slow the progression of myopia. Hard contacts worn overnight to reshape the eye as well as other pharmacologic interventions that are in development are not yet FDA approved.

An actionable step is to increase time outdoors as sunlight exposure lowers the chances of nearsightedness in children. When doing close work, such as working on a computer or mobile device, encourage frequent breaks to focus on objects farther away. The America Optometric Association offers the 20-20-20 rule: take a 20-second break to view something 20 feet away every 20 minutes.