

MEDICAL



Dr. Mark D. Fromer is a board-certified ophthalmologist since 1988

How Eye Color Develops

Eye color often is the genetic trait that fascinates parents the most as a child develops. Will the child's eyes be black, brown, blue, gray, green, hazel or some combination of colors?

The color of a person's eyes depends on the amount of a pigment called melanin present in the iris of the eye (melanin is also responsible for the coloring of our skin).

At each end of the spectrum you have blue-eyed people, who have relatively small amounts of melanin, while brown-eyed people at the other end have lots of melanin present. People with other eye colors generally fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

What determines how much melanin is present in the iris is determined by hereditary genetics.

How a child looks depends on the genetic material each parent contributes to the child. But the parents' genes can mix and match in many different ways. The influences from each parent aren't known until — surprise — after the child is born! The colored part of the eye is called the iris, which has pigmentation that determines our eye color.

Human eye color originates with three genes, two of which are well understood. These genes account for the most common colors — brown, blue and green. Other colors, such as gray, hazel and multiple combinations are not fully understood or explainable at this time.

His eyes may be blue only temporarily; babies' eyes can change color if the brown pigment melanin develops as they grow.

We used to think of brown being "dominant" and blue being "recessive." But modern science has shown that eye color is not at all that simple. Also, eye colors don't come out as a blend of the parents' colors, as in mixing paint. Each parent has two pairs of genes on each chromosome. So multiple possibilities exist, depending on how the "Wheel of Fortune" spins.

Most babies are born with blue eyes that can darken in their first three years. Darkening occurs if melanin, a brown pigment usually not present at birth, develops with age. Children can have completely different eye colors than either of their parents. But if both parents have brown eyes, it's most likely that their children also will have brown eyes. The darker colors tend to dominate, so brown tends to win out over green, and green tends to win out over blue. However, a brown/blue parent mix doesn't automatically produce a brown-eyed child.

Some children are born with irises that don't match in color. This is usually caused by faulty developmental pigment transport, local trauma either in the womb or shortly after birth or a benign genetic disorder. Other causes can be inflammation, freckle (diffuse nevus) of the iris and Horner's syndrome. Having an early eye exam is important to make sure nothing serious is going on — and "nothing serious" is the most com-

mon finding.

What Color Will Your Baby's Eyes Be?

How eye color is inherited is far more complicated than what was thought back in the days when simple charts were created that supposedly could predict the eye color of children based on the eye color of their parents.

Generally, though, it's far more likely for two brown-eyed parents to have a blue-eyed child than for two blue-eyed parents to have a brown-eyed child. This is because the generally less dominant blue-eyed trait can be passed along by brown-eyed people until the genes for the lighter eye color happen to match up, possibly many generations later.

Two blue-eyed parents, on the other hand, are much less likely to have darker-eyed children. This is because darker eyes generally are so much more dominant that the genetic trait, when present, ordinarily would first show up in the parent, who then wouldn't be blue-eyed at all.

Still, due to the complexities of how genetic traits are passed along, it is entirely possible for two blue-eyed parents to have a brown-eyed child.

Changes in Eye Color

The iris is a muscle that expands and contracts to control pupil size. The pupil enlarges in dimmer lighting and grows smaller in brighter lighting. The pupil also shrinks when you focus on near objects, such as a book you are reading.

When the pupil size changes, the pigments in the iris compress or spread apart, changing the eye color a bit. Certain emotions can change both the pupil size and the iris color. That's why some people say their eyes change colors when they're angry or loving. Eye color also can change with age. This happens in 10 to 15 percent of the Caucasian population (people who generally have lighter eye colors). For instance, my once very brown eyes are now hazel, a combination of brown and green. However, some hazel eyes actually get darker with age.

Note that if your adult eye color changes pretty dramatically, or if one eye changes from brown to green or blue to brown, it's important to see your eye doctor. Eye color changes can be a warning sign of certain diseases, such as Fuch's heterochromic iridocyclitis, Horner's syndrome or pigmentary glaucoma. Ultimately, if you don't like the eye color you inherited, you can always change it with colored contact lenses. But remember, even colored contact lenses are a prescription medical device and must be prescribed and monitored by an eye doctor. Don't buy them over the Internet or get them from a friend without having an eye doctor's prescription!

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'Migraine victims have sensitive skin'

NEW YORK: People with migraine are more likely to experience severe skin sensitivity and pain doing daily activities such as brushing hair and wearing earrings, a new study has found.

In their study, researchers in the United States surveyed 16,573 people with headache and identified 11,737 participants with migraine, 1,491 with probable migraine and 3,345 with another kind of headache.

They found that 68 per cent of those who reported almost daily headaches (chronic migraine) and 63 per cent of those with episodic migraines had allodynia, the intensified and unpleasant, painful skin sensitivity, compared with those with other kinds of headaches.

According to the study's lead author

Marcelo Bigal of Albert Einstein College of Medicine here, "This condition causes discomfort or pain even during everyday activities like touching one's hair or putting on clothes.

"More importantly, this condition may be a risk factor for migraine progression, where individuals have migraines on more days than not. Identifying risk factors for progression is a very important public health priority.

"For example, it may be that individuals with allodynia should be more aggressively treated in order to prevent migraine progression, as well as to decrease this sensitivity on the skin."

Allodynia may signal that someone's migraines were becoming more frequent and severe, the researchers suggested. Moreover, the study also found that this type of skin pain was more common in women with migraine and people with migraine who were obese or had depression.

'Saffron may ease PMS symptoms'

NEW YORK: Saffron, a spice known for flavouring cuisine, might also offer an antidote to premenstrual syndrome, a small study suggests.

It's thought that the spice might influence depression symptoms via effects on the brain chemical serotonin.

Because alterations in serotonin activity are suspected in PMS, a team of Iranian researchers decided to study whether saffron supplements might help relieve these symptoms.

M Agha-Hosseini and colleagues at Tehran University of Medical Sciences randomly assigned 50 women to take either saffron capsules or a placebo twice a day over two menstrual cycles. The women, had all had PMS symptoms for at least six months.

At the end of the treatment period, three-quarters of the women on saffron capsules reported at least a 50% reduction in PMS symptoms.

That compared with only 8% of women in the placebo group, the researchers report in the medical journal

BJOG. In addition, the researchers found, 60% of the saffron group showed a 50% improvement in depression symptoms.

REHANA SAJJAD, MD. FACOG.

Obstetrics & Gynecology (Womens Healthcare, PC.)

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