

Eye Related Symptoms

One aspect of Chiari symptoms that does not receive much attention is how Chiari can affect the eyes and vision. People with Chiari can experience:

- Diplopia – double vision
- Nystagmus – rapid, involuntary, rhythmic movements of the eyes
- Strabismus – misalignment of the eyes, such as ‘cross-eyed’
- Esotropia – type of strabismus where one or both eyes is pointed inward due to the sixth cranial nerve being compromised
- Photophobia – sensitivity to bright lights
- Papilledema – swelling of the optic disc located at the end of the optic nerve. This is due to elevated pressure of the cerebrospinal fluid and can be very serious.

Recently, a group published a review of the literature where they searched for articles focused (no pun intended) specifically on eye related Chiari issues. While they found 32 such publications, in total they only involved 41 Chiari patients. There were 15 pediatric patients and 26 adult patients. Roughly three quarters were female.

Among the pediatric patients, double vision (53%), esotropia (53%), and nystagmus (35%) were the most reported findings. For adults, papilledema (54%) was the most common finding followed by nystagmus (31%). It is important to note that these percentages do not represent the entire Chiari patient population, but rather just what was found in ophthalmic related publications. However, the Chiari1000 contains data on close to 2000 patients. The Chiari1000 shows that photophobia (64%), or sensitivity to bright lights, is the most common eye/vision related symptom among all patients. Meanwhile 28% report double vision and less than 5% report strabismus.

Often clinical reports of Chiari case series include reports of eye related symptoms even if they are not the focus of the publication. It would be useful to conduct a systematic review of the literature that includes these types of papers as it would provide a more accurate assessment regarding how common these symptoms are.

{On a personal note, the author of this article was diagnosed with Chiari and a syrinx at 31 years of age. However, even as a young child he had double vision due to strabismus and extreme near sightedness.}

Source: Dhawan A, Dhawan J, Sharma AN, et al. Ophthalmic manifestations of Chiari malformation: a systematic review. *Can J Ophthalmol*. Published online April 21, 2026. doi:10.1016/j.jcjo.2026.03.026

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