

# Eye Exam Leads to Life-Saving Diagnosis for Little Boy

A little boy and a renewed promise for a healthy life. Something that simple, and yet profound, was what VSP doctor Adam P. Rubin, O.D., will remember forever. We'll call his nine-year-old patient Jimmy, and it was to Dr. Rubin's office in Gaithersberg, Md., that Jimmy's mom took the boy for a routine eye exam.

He'd been complaining about severe headaches for a few months and blurry vision in his right eye. A recent CT scan (brain x-ray) hadn't shown anything unusual, and Jimmy's regular doctor attributed the headaches to a sinus infection.

So Dr. Rubin settled in for the exam, but he quickly became concerned. "Right away, I noticed that his right pupil wasn't responding to light," he remembers. "That was alarming, and I continued looking more closely at the right eye."

Looking deeper still, the doctor saw something more troubling. "The optic nerve was completely discolored, a sign that can indicate a growth in that area. A tumor or large mass can press against the back of the eye, causing a pale-colored optic nerve head."

Dr. Rubin got on the phone and set up a visit for Jimmy with a brain specialist. It didn't take long for the specialist to find the real culprit – no sinus infection, but a tumor growing near Jimmy's pituitary gland. The tumor, known medically as craniopharyngioma, was benign. However, the results of it, if left unchecked, could have been anything but. That's because masses like these keep getting bigger and can press against the brain, so they can be fatal.

Jimmy had surgery soon after and is now doing great – in school and in life.

For Dr. Rubin's part, he'll never forget the day the boy's surgeon called him and congratulated him for "saving a life." Without a doubt, optometrists don't usually deal with the scarier and more threatening parts of medical care. But, as Dr. Rubin says, you just never know. That's because our eyes really are a unique view into our bodies. An eye doctor can see things others simply don't.

Says Dr. Rubin, "Any health condition can present itself during an eye exam. That's why I think it's important to get a yearly eye exam – not only to maintain good vision, but also to check your overall health and your eye health."

Optometry school preps future doctors to look beyond just the eye exam. Dr. Rubin says, "When I was in optometry school, they taught us how to look for signs and symptoms of medical conditions during eye exams – including even rare conditions, such as brain tumors."

For one little boy and many others out there, that training paid off.