

Do You Suffer From Computer Vision Syndrome?

(ARA) - Do you use computers daily at work or at home? If so, you may be suffering from computer vision syndrome and not even know it. According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), this syndrome leaves people vulnerable to problems like dry eye, eyestrain, neck and/or backache, light sensitivity and fatigue. These symptoms can result from individual visual problems, poor work station configuration and improper work habits.

Pre-existing, uncorrected vision problems like farsightedness and astigmatism, inadequate eye focusing or eye coordination abilities, and age-related eye issues also contribute to computer vision syndrome.



According to the AOA, working at a computer requires a great deal of eye movement and eye focusing. The constant re-focusing effort stresses the eye muscle, leading to computer-related vision problems. It can have a great impact on individuals' comfort and productivity, whether they are at work, school or home.

According to a survey conducted by the AOA, Americans are feeling the pain of computer vision syndrome. Forty-one percent said they have experienced eye strain, and 45 percent cited neck or back pain after prolonged computer or handheld device use. Many of these symptoms are temporary and will improve after ceasing computer work. However, some individuals may continue to experience visual problems, such as blurred distance vision, even after computer work has stopped. If the causes of the problem are not addressed, the symptoms will recur, and perhaps worsen, with future computer use.

Special computer glasses and computer screen filters are available to help reduce glare and discomfort, but only 11 percent of Americans currently use these devices.

Computer users can follow these guidelines to prevent or reduce eye and vision problems associated with computer vision syndrome:

- Have your vision checked regularly. Before the age of 60, adults should have comprehensive eye exams every two years, or as recommended by an eye doctor (yearly at age 61). Vision and eye health can change rapidly and frequently, particularly as one ages. Therefore, having one's vision examined on a regular, timely basis is important to maintaining overall health and for preventive reasons.
- Limit the amount of time you continuously use the computer. Practicing the 20/20 rule (look away from the computer every 20 minutes for 20 seconds) will minimize the development of eye-focusing problems and eye irritation caused by infrequent blinking.

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- Check the height and arrangement of the computer. Optometrists suggest more comfortable computer viewing can be achieved when the eyes are looking downward. Optimally, the computer screen should be 15 to 20 degrees below eye level (about 4 or 5 inches) as measured from the center of the screen and 20 to 28 inches from the eyes.
- Check for glare on the computer screen. Windows or other light sources should not be directly visible when sitting in front of the monitor. When this occurs, turn the desk or computer to prevent glare on the screen.
- Reduce the amount of lighting in the room to match the computer screen. A smaller light can be substituted for a bright overhead light or a dimmer switch can be installed to give flexible control of room lighting. Turn three-way bulbs to the lowest setting.
- Keep blinking. To minimize the chances of developing dry eye when using a computer, make an effort to blink frequently. Blinking keeps the front surface of the eye moist.

Viewing a computer screen is different than reading a printed page, reminds the AOA. Often the letters on the computer screen are not as precise or sharply defined, the level of contrast of the letters to the background is reduced, and the presence of glare and reflections on the screen may make viewing difficult.

For additional information regarding computer vision syndrome, please visit www.aoa.org.

Courtesy of ARAcontent