

# Protecting Your Eyesight from Computer Vision Syndrome

If you are one of the millions of Americans that spend long hours in front of a computer for at least a portion of the day, you're not alone. Viewing a computer often makes the eyes work harder as it is different from reading a printed page.

Many individuals who use computers for a prolonged period of time suffer from headaches and neck and back pain. These symptoms and others, including blurred vision, and dry and irritated eyes can all be symptoms of what the American Optometric Association (AOA) refers to as "Computer Vision Syndrome,"\* and it is a common problem. Prolonged eye strain while working at a computer may permanently affect your vision. While it's almost impossible to avoid computers completely, here are tips and strategies to minimize the problem and provide relief:



**POSITIONING** – Proper positioning when working on the computer can minimize eye strain. If possible, avoid placing your monitor too high or too low. Most people find it more comfortable to view a computer when their eyes are looking downward. You shouldn't have to hunch over or strain your upper body to use the keyboard or see the screen. Keep your feet flat on the floor or use a footstool.

**LIGHTING** – Position yourself to avoid glare from overhead lights and windows. You strain your eyes when there is excess glare on the computer screen. At the same time, make sure that there is adequate lighting. Without proper lighting, your eyes can also be overworked. Modifying the lighting in the room, closing window shades, changing the brightness or contrast of the screen, or attaching an anti-glare screen are ways you can reduce the glare on your monitor.

**BLINKING** – Make an effort to blink frequently. Several times an hour take a moment and slowly blink 10 times. This keeps your eyes lubricated. You can also use over-the-counter eye drops/artificial tears to help prevent dry eyes.

**TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS** – Look away from the computer screen at something across the room. Looking away relaxes the muscles that are used to focus and will help reduce eye fatigue. The AOA suggests for every 20 minutes of computer viewing, look into the distance for 20 seconds to allow your eyes a chance to refocus.\* If possible, get up and move around to allow your eyes to refocus while stretching your muscles.

**REFERENCE MATERIALS** – Place your materials above the keyboard but below the monitor. You might also use a document holder placed beside the monitor. These lessen the need to constantly refocus your eyes as well as the need to swing your head back and forth between the materials and monitor.

**HAVE REGULAR EYE EXAMS** – Regular eye exams will ensure your eyesight is good and determine if prescription eyewear is needed. If you use a computer for the majority of your day, be sure to let your optometrist know. Special computer glasses can be prescribed to ease the strain.



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\*<http://www.aoa.org/x5253.xml#3>