

Weekly Wellness Tip

Avoiding Eyestrain at the Computer

Whether you use a computer every day or just occasionally, you may have questions about how to avoid eyestrain. Knowing how to use your computer properly is the key to avoiding tired or sore eyes at home and at work.

Tips on using a computer comfortably

Reading from a computer screen is different from reading a book. For example, you typically read from a computer screen at a different angle than you read a book, or you may use a different kind of lighting. Here are some tips for working at your computer:

- **Look away from your screen periodically.** Many vision experts suggest following the “20/20” rule. After 20 minutes of computer use, look at distant objects for 20 seconds. This brief respite gives your eyes a relaxing change of focus.
- **Keep your eyes moist.** It’s a good idea to keep eye drops or “artificial tears” in a drawer near your computer so you can moisten your eyes if they feel dry. Eye drops may be especially helpful if you live in a region with a very dry climate.
- **Maintain good posture.** Slouching can cause you to look at your computer from awkward angles. Keep your feet on the floor. You may want to use a foot rest if you’re short. Keep your upper body straight but inclined slightly forward from the hips, and keep your forearms horizontal or slightly lower when you’re using the keyboard.
- **Walk around on your break or lunch hour.** Try to rest your eyes on your break or lunch hour by getting up from your desk for a few minutes. This gives your eyes a break from the screen and may also provide a restful change of lighting.

Protecting your eyes

- **Get regular eye checkups.** Some eye problems are “silent” or symptom-free and may cause problems even if you don’t feel eyestrain or have redness. Regular checkups can help to detect these and other conditions that may interfere with good vision.
- **Keep your computer screen free of glare.** You can eliminate glare by turning your computer to face a different angle, adjusting window treatments, or adjusting the nearby lighting.
- **Use a document holder.** Using a document holder when you’re entering data allows you to position your material at a comfortably steady angle near your computer. Working from a document that’s placed too far away, or at an awkward angle, may strain not just your eyes, but your neck and back as well.
- **Adjust your brightness controls.** Working at a computer is easiest when there’s a high contrast between the text and the background. Experiment with the brightness controls on your computer to find the level of contrast that feels most comfortable.
- **Don’t sit too close to your screen.** It’s best to keep your screen 16 – 30 inches from your eyes. Many people find 20 – 26 inches to be ideal. If you need to move closer to read text or see images, or if you feel you’re always “pressing your nose to the screen,” you may need eyeglasses or a stronger prescription.
- **If possible, use a large font or text size.** If you have a choice of fonts or text sizes, use a large size. A small size that feels comfortable at first may become tiring after you’ve been using your computer for an hour or two.

It’s important to remember that eye problems at the computer are not “normal.” See a doctor promptly if you have eye pain, double vision, a loss or dimness of vision, or redness or swelling of the eyes. These may also be caused by general eye or health problems, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. If that is the case, your eye problems may not ease or end until you’ve had medical treatment.