Eye care advice for screen users

One in four UK adults are now spending 14 hours or more a day on screens[1] – that's twice as long as the average person spends sleeping a night![2] With such high levels of screen-time it's important we're all aware of the impact this can have on our eye health and understand some simple steps we can take to minimise the effects.

Screen fatigue
Looking at screens won't permanently damage your eyes; however, it may cause eye strain, headaches, and trigger episodes of visual stress.

These reactions to prolonged screen use are commonly known as 'screen fatigue' and while symptoms tend to subside after resting your eyes, screen fatigue can be uncomfortable and frustrating.

Extended screen time can also make symptoms of existing eye conditions such as uncorrected myopia (short-sightedness) more pronounced.

Eye complaints
Symptoms associated with staring at a screen for long stretches without taking breaks can include:

• **Tired eyes**. Ocular muscles, like any others, can get tired from continued focus on close work.
• Viewing a screen for extended periods can lead to **headaches** and **concentration difficulties**.
• **Blurred vision**. Gazing at a fixed distance for an extended period can cause your focus to spasm or 'lock up'. This can cause your vision to blur temporarily when you look away from the screen.
• **Dry eyes**. Studies consistently show that people's blink rate drops significantly when concentrating on a digital screen. A reduced blink rate can speed up evaporation of the eyes' tear film resulting in **dry, itchy, red** or even **watery eyes**.

Minimise the effects
Being screen SMART can help prevent symptoms of screen fatigue and keep your eyes feeling fresh and bright.:

Switch off! Make sure you switch off your screen before bedtime. Over stimulation from screen light at night can increase eye strain and wreak havoc with your sleep.

Measure the distance between your face and your device to prevent your eyes working too hard. The 1, 2, 10 method is a good rule of thumb. Keep phone screens 1 foot (about 30 cm) away from your face, laptops and monitors 2 feet away (65cm+) and TVs 10 feet (3.3 metres).

Adjust your environment to ensure it's an eye-friendly space. Are you sitting comfortably? Are copy documents positioned at roughly the same distance as your eyes are from the screen? Have you minimised any glare or reflections from windows and lighting? Are you using a suitable font size (12pts+)? Have you cleaned your screen?

Also, always remember to wear any eyewear prescribed for screen use.

Refresh your eyes by consciously blinking. Your blink rate can fall by as much as 60% when looking at a screen; leaving them prone to dry eye. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water too.

For an instant refresh try closing your eyes and rolling your eyeball around behind the closed lid.

Take a break – Give your eyes a rest by following the 20-20-20 rule. Look away from your screen every twenty minutes, for 20 seconds and focus on something 20 feet away. You should also break up screen time by spending time outdoors – A couple of hours outdoor activity a day can help counter eye strain caused by focusing on close work such as staring at screens or reading.

If you regularly use a screen for work your employer will pay the cost of regular eye tests and cover costs of eyewear if it is prescribed specifically for screen use. Ask you HR or Occupational Health Team for information about their eye care policy and benefits for employees.

WRITTEN BY:
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[1] *New Uses of Screen in Post-Lockdown Britain, University of Leeds, 2022*
[2] *YouGov Sleep Study, 2022*