Computers and Your Tired Eyes

By Mark T. Shapiro, MD

Computers save us time. And bring the world to our desk tops. And cause vision problems.

That's right, vision problems. As an eye doctor, almost 90% of my patients say that in just a few hours in front of a computer, they will begin to feel symptoms of a problem called Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). And three out of four people will need special lenses to get relief.

What is Computer Vision Syndrome? It's a combination of many different eye fatigue symptoms that can include any or all of these:

- Tired and burning eyes
- Eye strain
- Squinting
- Glare
- Double vision
- Changes in color perception
- Slow refocusing when look from a computer screen to distant objects
- Irritated and/or dry eyes
- Sore neck, back and shoulder muscles

And CVS doesn't just cause minor discomfort. It can often lead to physical fatigue, decreased productivity and errors at work. Some people also experience annoying eye twitching. It is not known to result in permanent eye damage, but some recent research has suggested that computer-related eyestrain may contribute to the development of myopia. So everyone who uses a computer should take Computer Vision Syndrome seriously.

Here are 7 easy steps you can take to reduce your risk:

1. Get a Comprehensive Eye Exam

Having an annual eye exam is the most important thing you can do to prevent or treat computer vision problems. According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH], computer users should have an eye exam before they start working on a computer and once a year thereafter. During your exam, be sure to tell your eye doctor how often you use a computer at work and at home.

2. Talk To Your Eye Doctor About Computer Glasses

If you've ever used reading glasses, you may have noticed that they are designed to focus at a specific distance – the distance most people hold a book or magazine. But for most people the distance to a computer monitor is considerably further than normal reading distance. At Shapiro Eye Care, we recommend using computer glasses that will focus at your specific working distance. Also, adding a tint on your glasses helps to reduce glare. If your eyes feel dry when working on a computer, there are specific treatments for dry eyes that can make your eyes feel less dry.

3. Use Proper Lighting/Reduce Environmental Glare

Poor lighting contributes to eye strain. Keep bright lighting overhead to a minimum and position your desk lamp to shine on your desk, and not at your screen. If possible, close the blinds or drapes and move the screen away from any light source to eliminate any glare on the screen from the windows in your home or office.

4. Modify Your Workstation

Place your computer monitor approximately 20-24 inches from your eyes and tilt the monitor so that it is 15 to 20 degrees below eye level, as measured from the center of the screen, for comfortable positioning of your head and neck. Your feet should be flat on the floor and your desk height should be approximately 26". Your arms should be positioned at a right angle when typing on the keyboard and all material should be easy to read.

5. Adjust Your Computer Settings

Adjust the brightness and contrast setting on your computer monitor to your preference. Change the font size and style to a bold face on your computer monitor or tablet. Use a high resolution monitor that will give you the best black and white and color contrast.

6. Blink Often!

When looking at a computer or hand-held digital device, it is common for you to blink two or three times less than you normally would. This can lead to "dry eye." Blinking bathes your eyes in tears, and tears are naturally therapeutic for the eyes. For more help on dry eyes, visit *www.shapiroeyecare.com.*

7. Take Frequent Breaks!

Follow the 20/20/20 rule for computer use: After 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds to allow your eyes to rest. In addition, the NIOSH recommends that computer workers take four 5-minute breaks in addition to the customary two 15-minute breaks during the day. FW

Dr. Mark Shapiro is Medical Director of Shapiro Eye Care, a full service ophthalmology practice in Greensboro, NC, including complete eye exams, LASIK, cataract surgery, glaucoma management and optical and contact lens services.