

Digital eye strain: screen habits and setup

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In short

Digital eye strain is tired, sore or dry eyes, blur or headaches after long periods on a computer, phone or tablet. It is common and usually eases with rest. Regular breaks, blinking and a good screen setup help many people. If symptoms keep coming back, an eye test can check whether glasses or dry eye are part of the cause.

Common symptoms

- Tired, sore or itchy eyes
- Watery or dry eyes
- Blurred vision, or trouble refocusing on things far away
- Headaches
- Sensitivity to light
- A sore neck, shoulders or back

What causes it

Looking at a screen for a long time works your eyes in two ways.

- **You blink less.** People normally blink about 15 times a minute, but only about 5 to 7 times a minute on a screen. The surface of the eye dries, which makes eyes feel tired and gritty.
- **Your focusing muscles work hard.** Holding focus up close for a long time tires them, like any muscle.

Other things add to it: glare, poor or very bright lighting, being tired or stressed, dry air from fans or air-conditioning, and glasses that are out of date or not suited to screen work.

Screen habits

- 1 Follow the 20/20/20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something about 6 metres (20 feet) away for 20 seconds. A timer can remind you.
- 2 Blink fully and often, especially when concentrating.
- 3 After about 2 hours of continuous screen work, rest your eyes for 15 minutes.
- 4 Use lubricating eye drops from the pharmacy if your eyes feel dry.
- 5 Spend time outdoors and look at things far away.
- 6 Make sure children take regular breaks from phones, games and TV too.

Setting up your screen

- Sit about an arm's length from your computer screen.
- Set the screen so its upper edge is at or just below eye level, and you look slightly down.
- Match the screen brightness to the room, and adjust contrast and text size so text is easy to read.
- Keep light behind you, shining onto your work rather than into your eyes. Use blinds to cut window glare.
- Keep the screen clean.
- Point fans and air-conditioning vents away from your face.

Glasses and screens

Glasses made for distance or reading may not suit a screen, which sits in between. If you spend long hours at a computer, tell your optometrist about your screen

setup and distances. Glasses for screen distance may be an option. See our [digital eye strain service](#).

Blue light filtering lenses are widely sold for screen use. A 2023 Cochrane review found they may not reduce eye strain from computer use over the short term, compared with standard lenses.

Digital eye strain and dry eye

Less blinking on screens can make dry eye symptoms worse. If your eyes feel dry, gritty or watery most days, see our [dry eye guide](#) for home care and when to book an assessment.

When to call us on (03) 9702 9118

- Symptoms do not settle after resting your eyes, or keep coming back
- Your glasses do not seem to help as much as they used to
- Double vision
- Headaches with screen work most days

[Call \(03\) 9702 9118](#)

To book [an eye test](#), [book online](#) or call us on [\(03\) 9702 9118](#).

FAQs

— What is the 20/20/20 rule?

Every 20 minutes, look at something about 6 metres (20 feet) away for 20 seconds. It gives your focusing muscles a short rest.

— Do blue light glasses help with eye strain?

A 2023 Cochrane review found blue light filtering lenses may not reduce eye strain from computer use over the short term. Breaks, blinking, screen setup and the right prescription are where to start.

— Can screens cause dry eye?

Screen use makes us blink less often, which can dry the eye surface and make dry eye symptoms worse. See our [dry eye guide](#).

— Do children get digital eye strain?

Yes, especially with long periods on phones, games or TV. Regular breaks and time outdoors help.
