

EYESTRAIN

What is Eyestrain?



Eye strain occurs when you over-use your eye muscles. Any muscle held in one position too long will cause the muscle to strain. When you concentrate on reading, working at a computer or even watching television for any length of time, your inner eye muscles tighten causing your eyes to hurt and become irritated, dry and uncomfortable.

An eye test will determine whether eye symptoms due to eye muscle strain or eye muscle malfunction.

If you're just entering the prime years by being over 40 years old, eyestrain may be a sign that you need glasses for reading or you may just have dry eyes for some reason possibly a blocked tear duct for example.

Eyestrain Causes



There are a small number of causes which can result in people suffering from Eye strain and sometimes accompanied by headaches. These can differ from person to person and can be triggered differently from person to person.

Headache and eye strain triggers include:

- stress
- tiredness
- bad posture
- fluorescent lights
- stuffy work area
- eye fatigue

- misuse of alcohol
- reading when tired

The above list contains the common causes and it is important that if you are suffering from one of the triggers that you take time, to see if you can make small changes which will benefit yourself to help the triggers to go away of their own accord.

Computer users are the user group which is heavily prone to suffer eyestrain. This is because they typically spend long hours in front of a computer screen, and if they are working with one of the options below, as well, this can make eye strain worse:

- have poor eyesight
- have poor contrast on monitors, or difficult to read screens
- bad lighting around screen area
- have a poor viewing angle
- working too close to a computer monitor and/or document

Eyestrain Symptoms



Eye strain conditions can include the following symptoms:

- Soreness of the eyes
- Headaches
- Blurry vision
- Dry itching or burning eyes.

It is important to monitor how often these symptoms occur, when they occur, and the duration.

Do they appear when doing something in particular or after finishing a certain task?

By trying to pin point the duration, how often and the symptom or series of symptoms you can provide an optometrist with a diary of events to help them confirm any self diagnoses or concerns you may have made.

What you can do about Eyestrain



Well the first thing you can do about eye strain is to read this information. The key thing is to first gather as much information that you can, try to understand a bit more about the probable causes and resulting effects to see if they are similar to your experiences.

The next thing to do if you are unsure is to make an appointment with an Optician for an eye test. The Optician will be able to have a good look at your eyes and by answering their questions honestly and mentioning the symptoms you are suffering from, be able to give you a probable cause and suggest what to do about it.

You may find you just need a rest especially away from screens and other equipment, or you may be told you have become slightly short or long sighted. Do not think of this as a major problem, everyone knows several people in today's world who use and benefit from glasses. You don't want glasses I hear you say. Well that's fine as well just speak to our Optician and see if Contact Lenses would be possible.

Is Eyestrain Common?



The short answer is YES! Eyestrain is common but only within certain working environments and user groups. The two groups most at risk from eye strain are office workers and users of other screen or close-up work.

The simple reason for this is they spend countless hours sat in front of a Computer screen. Let's say the average office worker works a 40 hour week, that's 160hrs a month before any overtime or time unpaid stuck in the office trying to get on top of your work load.

160hrs / month * 12 Months = 1920 working hours per year, before holiday or sick absence.

The sad fact is eye strain is becoming more common as not only do people spend hours in front of a screen during the working day. They then come home and may watch anything from an hour

to four or five hours of television per night, say a film and soap opera the time does quickly add up.

During this time you are once again focusing your eyes on a screen. These concentrations minimise the movement of the eye without this movement the muscles become strained and can cause you to experience pain.

Eyestrain Treatment



If you are currently experiencing eye strain then you need to take time for the muscles around the eye to recover. You need to prevent further damage by gently working the muscles which have become strained and experienced minor damage.

The first thing would be to take a break and try to relax your eyes by allowing them to focus on objects around the room or even outside. Let your eye travel from object to object your eyes will automatically adjust themselves to the subject you are looking at. If the strain does not ease after five to ten minutes then you could try to sooth the eyes and perform eye exercises gently.

Sooth the eyes



If you need to sooth your eyes or treat puffy eyes then we have put together a number of different treatments to try. All are cheap and easy to do so why not give them a try and see how your eyes feel afterwards.

1. Splash your whole face with cold water, the coldest you can stand is best. Try to do this first thing in the morning when the eyes are fairly relaxed from sleeping. Use either cold water or a mixture of water and ice cubes. Aim to spend around 5 minutes, if possible doing this to allow the temperature of the water to be felt in the muscles.
2. Soak two tea bags in water, then wring out the excess water, and place in the refrigerator or freezer to chill. Once chilled, lie down and place the bags on closed eyelids for 5 to 10 minutes.

3. Cut two slices of a cold cucumber, each around 1 /2 inch thick. Place a slice on each eyelid for 5 minutes.
4. Make sure you are drinking plenty of fluids. Lack of fluids can lead to headaches and lead to eye strain. Puffy eyes usually indicate water retention, by drinking plenty of liquids this flushes excess salt from your system and stops the Puffiness showing on the eyes.
5. By removing contact lenses each night before sleeping you can avoid soreness and puffiness caused by lens irritation and drying from happening during the night.
6. If problems still persist then consult an optometrist, as you can buy a number of gels and masks to help soothe the area.

Check your working environment



Unsurprisingly eye strain sufferers are typically those who use computer and other screens for long periods. By focusing on the screen for a long duration the eye muscles remain at one tension and do not alter which can cause the muscles to become strained.

It is important not only for your eyes but for yourself to take regular short breaks away from your screen. By taking just a few minutes to make a drink and having a stretch of your arms will allow your eyes, legs, arms and back muscles to move and contract into a different position.

You should also check your working environment as this is the place where you will spend countless hours focusing on the small icons from your screen.

You should ensure the Monitor or screen you are using is placed slightly below your eye level. The reason is so that the eye can view it at a more natural angle, don't believe me? Then try focusing on a close object at eye level and looking up every two seconds, if you had to do this for even a short time your eyes would only thank you with a strain and aching pain.

Make sure your chair is adjustable and offers your back and arms enough support. It is important to have your keyboard and mouse along with other equipment including telephones to be at a comfortable useable height and angle.

If you spend a lot of time on the telephone, you should consider using a headset to free up your hands and stop you from holding the phone with your shoulder and hand whilst you try to type or write something down.

Here is a check list to evaluate your computer situation:

1. The top of the VDT screen should be placed slightly below eye level.
2. Your reference material should be placed on a document holder and moved close enough to the screen so that you do not have to swing your head and eyes back and forth from your material to the VDT screen.
3. Try adjusting your lighting to eliminate or decrease glare and harsh reflections. If office lighting or window shades can not be modified, hoods or VDT filters may decrease the problems.
4. A frequent break in eye usage by simply glancing out the window or looking 20 feet away will help. Simply standing up and stretching in place for 5 seconds will reduce fatigue.
5. Research shows that working on a computer reduces normal blinking by half, from 20 times a minute, to 10 times a minute. To keep the eyes from drying out and feeling hot, tired and itchy, try blinking more rapidly every once in awhile or occasionally closing your eyes for a few seconds, alternating with the looking at a distant object.
6. Anyone with diagnosed dry eyes would benefit from using artificial tears
7. Get a check up from your optometrist to see if you need prescription glasses to resolve eyestrain. Sometimes vocational spectacles are required that are specific to screen work

Check your Posture



Bad posture can easily lead to Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) and eye strain especially if it at the same time you are working in poor light conditions.

RSI is a term given to a variety of related conditions which are caused by working a muscle to hard or at an angle which places strain and stress on the muscles.

If you are unsure about your own posture, try looking in a mirror side on. Also why not ask a friend or family member for their honest opinion on your shape and posture. Set yourself reminders to look at your own posture after working on a screen or playing video games for a set time, you will most likely notice your shape is different to your first thought.

Of course you should not overlook your desk or working environment, are the keyboards, mice and monitor at the correct height? Is your chair comfortable and provides plenty of support and is adjustable? If not then look into changing them, the costs if any will be minimal and allow you to work better and easier.

How many of the below do you recognise?

Maybe they will urge you into taking notice of yourself and others posture.

The main cause of eye strain is from viewing Computer screens at the incorrect angle or when viewing for long periods when

Seeing your slumped posture, everybody, well-meaning, chips in with the same advice: Sit up! Stand straight!

It soon becomes obvious that this is a struggle. Hence the next juicy bit of advice.

"Do your back and shoulders feel too weak? Then strengthen them! Start a regime of exercises to strengthen your back and shoulder muscles!"

I hope you can now see what bad advice this really is. Your back muscles are already being worked too hard. That's why they don't feel strong enough.

Muscle is fighting muscle in a relentless tug-of-war. When you make the extra effort to be truly straight, the resulting appearance of good posture is a stiff, tiring and unnatural travesty - far less functional, even, than the slump you are trying to correct.

That's why it ends in pain - often extremely severe pain. To get rid of the pain for good you need to sort this mess out.