

STARS BEFORE YOUR EYES

Work with computers can be very hard on the eyes. A wide range of unpleasant symptoms can occur; these include “eyestrains” burning or tender eyes, red, watering eyes, blurred vision/difficulty focusing, double vision, grittiness/drying or aching eyes, changes in colour perception – seeing floating coloured “blobs” after staring at the screen, heaviness above the eyes and headaches.

Any problems with focusing on the screen must be dealt with by a registered ophthalmic optician. Computer work does make very high demands on the eyes and may make you aware of problems you had not noticed previously. It is, therefore, very important that any visual defects are dealt with.

Working at the screen for long periods of time can also fatigue the eye muscles. The eyes focus by action in small muscles around the eyes. Different muscles act to focus the eyes at different distances. If you are focusing at one distance for some time then the same group of muscles are working at that time and will eventually tire. So it is a good idea to change the point of focus regularly by looking around the room or out of a window. Also, try to break up the working day to involve a variety of tasks rather than spending the whole day in front of a screen.

Dryness and soreness are other common problems. Some studies have found that our normal ‘blink rate’ goes down when working at a screen. Blinking is the eyes natural windscreen wiper, stimulating tear production and washing out contaminants. So if the blinking rate goes down this can lead to greater dryness and irritation. Deliberate blinking can be helpful in relieving these symptoms. Air conditioned offices can make the problem worse so it is helpful to get out of the office at lunchtime. It is not a good idea to use proprietary eye drops as these can make things worse in the long term.

People who use contact lenses can find that the problem of dryness in the eyes is particularly troublesome and the only realistic solution may be to wear spectacles while working at the screen.

Finally, as with all physical problems linked with computer work the key really is to take breaks away from the screen as often as it possible during the working day.

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