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Computer-Related Vision Problems on the Rise



The Information Age has created a new vision problem: Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). More than 143 million Americans work on computers each day, and according to the American Optometric Association, studies indicate that 50% to 90% of computer users suffer from symptoms of computer vision syndrome.

CVS is the term coined to refer to a variety of symptoms caused by computer use. Symptoms range from headaches and tired eyes to double vision, even extending to the neck and shoulders.

The condition is a result of the eyes' inability to focus on characters on a computer screen because, unlike printed type, computer characters are brightest at the center and lighter on the edges. The eyes jump around as they try to focus, making them tired and affecting other areas of the upper body.

The effects of CVS are neither permanent nor damaging to the eye. Nonetheless, the AOA reports that approximately 10 million eye exams are performed annually in the United States due to vision problems related to computer use. Furthermore, CVS can reduce productivity by as much as 20% according to a study by the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry.

CVS is usually easy to alleviate. Flat panel monitors and LCD screens, which have crisper resolution, can help, as can placing the monitor 20 to 26 inches away from you. Always use the computer in proper light, blink more frequently to keep eyes moist and take breaks to rest the eyes.

People with severe CVS symptoms can also consider computer eyewear or UV coating on lenses to reduce glare. Talk with your doctor to learn about computer eyewear options.

As always, eye examinations will help, too. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends having an eye exam prior to beginning a job that requires heavy computer use and annually thereafter to monitor and manage symptoms.

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