

Eye Strain

This material will help you understand eye strain, its causes, and treatment.

What is eye strain?

Eye strain, also called asthenopia, occurs when your eyes get tired from using them too long, or too intensely. You may experience it most when you are driving a car, reading, or working on a computer for long periods of time. It usually disappears once you have rested your eyes. Although annoying, eye strain is not serious.

What causes eye strain?

Common causes of eye strain are from activities that involve concentrating for long periods of time. The most common cause of eye strain is “Computer Vision Syndrome.” This occurs when you use a computer for a long time.

Other common causes of eye strain include:

- Activities that require intense focus and concentration for long periods
- Exposure to bright lights
- Trying to see in dim lighting.
- Needing glasses or an updated glasses prescription
- Poor accommodation (the eye muscles have difficulty focusing on near work)

These causes may lead to symptoms like:

- Tired eyes
- Eye pain

- Blurred or double vision
- Burning eyes
- Watery eyes
- Dry eyes
- Headaches
- Light sensitivity

How is eye strain treated?

The best way to treat eye strain is to first make sure your glasses are up to date. The next best way is to try to improve your environment. For example, if you spend a lot of time in front of a computer, reduce the brightness setting. Glare covers for computer screens can help. Increasing the size of print or images may also be helpful. Take “eye breaks” by closing your eyes for thirty seconds.

Be sure to blink often. Blinking refreshes your eye naturally. Because we do not blink very often when we are concentrating, it can be helpful to have artificial tears next to your computer. Use the artificial tears during your “eye break” to refresh your eyes.

Your doctor may have told you that you have poor accommodative capacity. Your eye muscles may have trouble working together to focus on near work. In these cases, you should do “pencil pushups.”

Before doing “pencil pushups,” make sure you are wearing your glasses. Then, hold up a pencil about 12-15 inches from your nose and concentrate by looking at the tip of the pencil. Make sure the tip of the pencil is in clear focus. As you bring the pencil in closer to your nose, the tip may become blurry or you may even notice a second blurred image of the pencil tip. Try to get your eyes to

focus together and keep the image sharp. Hold the pencil at that spot for at least 2-3 seconds and then bring the pencil back away from your nose and let your eyes relax for a few seconds. Repeat this exercise 10 times and perform it 3 times per day to strengthen the eye muscles that help you see up close. When you are looking at the tip of the pencil very close to your nose, your eyes will feel strained for those few seconds. That is normal and tells you that you are exercising those muscles.

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