Avoid the Discomfort of Computer Vision Syndrome



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Workers spend an average of 2.5 hours a day at work sorting e-mails. Compound that with an hour a day of watching television and several more hours reading news updates and watching video on your smartphone and it amounts to an average of eight hours per day of staring at screens, according to a study conducted by the Council for Research Excellence.

Focusing on a stationary object like a screen for a long period of time can have health consequences. The most common is a temporary condition called Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS).

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Symptoms of CVS include headaches, dry eyes, blurred vision, neck pain, red eyes, double vision and difficulty focusing the eyes. While temporary, the symptoms of CVS can range from uncomfortable (dry eyes) to painful (severe headaches).

CVS can be aggravated by poor lighting conditions, air moving past your eyes (for instance, air conditioning or forced heat in an office from overhead fans) or very bright lights.

A study conducted by the University of Alabama at Birmingham found that worker productivity noticeably declines when workers are suffering from symptoms of CVS.

Example

Debbie is a software engineer at a large gaming company. She enjoys her work and often gets lost in the projects she's working on. It's not uncommon for her to stare at her computer screen for several hours at a time without a break. Her office has poor lighting, with just one fluorescent light on the ceiling and one of the lights burned out. Last week, Debbie complained of a headache a few hours after getting to work. Her neck hurt and her vision had become blurry. By early afternoon, Debbie was feeling so poorly that she took the rest of the afternoon off.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Your eyes need to rest to avoid becoming dry and straining muscles Use the 20/20/20 rule to avoid CVS symptoms. Every 20 minutes, focus your eyes on an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This will give the ciliary muscles in your eyes time to rest. If you aren’t able to see 20 feet away from your desk, you can also just close your eyes for 20 seconds every 20 minutes.

In addition to letting your eyes rest periodically, over-the-counter eye solutions are available that can help reduce the effects of dry eyes.

Decreased ability to focus eyes can also be alleviated by wearing a small plus-powered (+1.00 to +1.50) over-the-counter pair of eyeglasses. Wearing eyeglasses can help workers regain their ability to focus on near objects.

Ensure that rooms are well lit, and that light fixtures with burned out bulbs are promptly replaced. A lamp can be used to help brighten up a dark office. In some cases, it may make sense to have additional lighting or brighter bulbs installed.

If headaches or other symptoms of CVS persist even after giving your eyes a regular break, an eye doctor can advise you of other solutions to help alleviate your symptoms.

FINAL WORD

Workers who spend several hours a day or more in front of a computer screen stand a 90-percent chance of experiencing some of the symptoms of CVS at some point in their careers. The symptoms of CVS can cut into productivity and result in worker discomfort. Practice the 20/20/20 rule to avoid the symptoms of CVS.