

Log Kids' Computer Use and Keep Eye Problems in Check

Ninety percent of the nation's 65 million school-age children use computers daily. A typical American kid spends one to three hours on the Internet each day.

It's the digital age, for sure. And with it comes "digital-eyes." Formally known as computer vision syndrome, computer eyestrain goes along with computers like peanut butter goes with jelly. And it does the same thing to kids as it has been doing to computer-bound grown-ups for years in the workplace. Headaches, blurry vision, dry and sore eyes are the main clues.

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But it's really bad news in the younger set, because their eyesight is still developing, along with the rest of them.

Eye doctors are seeing more cases of computer eyestrain in children. Dr. Stuart Spind, O.D., of Glen Burnie, Md., is one of them.

“Computers can be very useful and they're lots of fun,” he says. “But in my own practice, I've noticed overuse of the computer by kids often leads to eyestrain – and it can lead to severe headaches, as well.”

A University of California study reported that 30% of school-age computer users were at risk for computer eyestrain, headaches, eye fatigue and shoulder pain.

Parents and other adults can keep eyestrain in check. Here are some pointers from Dr. Spind:

- **Daily dose it.** Just as with TV, computer use should be timed according to age (see sidebar for guidelines).
- **De-glare it.** Keep the monitor clean and use a glare-reducing monitor filter.
- **Break it.** Every hour, have your child take a 10-minute break from the computer (the same goes for you).
- **Face it.** The computer screen should be 20-24 inches from your child's face (ditto for mom and dad). And, his or her feet need to touch the floor. There should be a slight downward angle from face to screen.
- **Wear it.** If your child wears prescription glasses – for computer use or otherwise – make sure he or she has them on.

Time it

Dr. Spind shares some suggested time limits for daily computer use by children. Remember the old adage, all things in moderation, and apply it here too.

Age	Suggested Time-Limit
Under 10	30 minutes a day
10-13	1 hour a day
14-15	2 hours a day
16-18	Parents' best judgment