

Computer Vision Syndrome:

Take Steps to Protect Your Eyes



Some 75 million Americans have jobs that require them to sit in front of a computer for many hours a day, says the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

More than half of these workers will sooner or later be hit with a medical condition called computer vision syndrome (CVS) that could leave them with blurred vision, headaches and dry, inflamed eyes.

It's true: America's ever-increasing reliance on computers is taking a toll on the nation's eyesight — with many workers reporting that CVS makes their jobs more difficult. But there's good news. New “computer glasses” and common-sense precautions can help lessen CVS symptoms.

“There's no longer any doubt that computer vision syndrome is a very real health condition or that it adversely affects work performance,” says VSP network doctor Stephen Glasser, O.D., of Washington, D.C., who specializes in treating the condition. “The important thing to remember about computers is that they represent a new kind of work environment that needs special attention.

“Because computers are self-illuminating, they can produce a great deal of harmful glare for the eyes. In addition, they're usually positioned at a much higher angle, and at a greater distance, than traditional paper documents resting on an office desk. These three factors — glare, angle of viewing and increased distance — combine to produce the symptoms of CVS.”

How can you distinguish between ordinary eye fatigue and CVS? “The key to making the CVS diagnosis is the duration of symptoms,” says Dr. Glasser. “If you're experiencing two or more symptoms daily, you can be pretty sure you're struggling with CVS.”

The most common CVS symptom is blurred vision that occurs when you shift your gaze from the computer screen to distant objects. Dry, inflamed eyes are another common sign. Other symptoms include eyestrain, headaches, increased sensitivity to glare, discomfort from your contact lenses and neck and shoulder pain.



Although CVS is on the increase, Dr. Glasser says eyecare doctors have recently prescribed a new weapon against it. “We're seeing the rapid emergence of new glasses specifically designed for the computer user,” he says. “Typically, the upper part of the lens will allow the user to see the monitor clearly, while the bottom part will help the user focus on the keyboard or on documents to be read.

“When prescribing these new ‘computer glasses,’ your eye doctor will take into account such factors as the type of lighting in your work area, the amount of glare and the distance between your eyes and the computer screen. By custom-tailoring your glasses for computer use, we can eliminate most of the factors that cause CVS.” •

Here are a few other tips from Dr. Glasser to help prevent computer vision syndrome:

- Use artificial tears periodically if needed to lubricate your eyes.
- Make sure your computer screen is at least four to eight inches lower than your straight-ahead line of vision.
- Use an antiglare screen on your computer.
- Close your eyes from time to time and roll them to relax your eye muscles. Every 20 minutes take 20 seconds and look at least 20 feet away to relax your eye muscles. •