Prevent Eye Strain with the 20-20-20 Rule

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According to data from https://datareportal.com/, the average American spends just over 7 hours in front of a screen daily. That translates into about 38 to 43 percent of folks waking hours. Eye strain can occur due to the lengthy screen time.

Let's first clarify that looking at digital devices won't necessarily damage your eyesight; however, it can cause strain. The eyes can become strained and dry due to prolonged staring at screens, which causes humans to decrease their blinking frequency (from about 15 blinks/minute to ~5-7 blinks/minute). The eye strain caused by screens is called computer vision syndrome (CVS). The main symptoms of CVS include sore, tired, burning, or itching eyes. Some people also suffer from dry, watery eyes, changes in vision (blurry or double), headaches and/or sensitivity to light. Anyone can suffer from CVS. Since children do not notice eye strain as much as adults, it is beneficial to monitor screen time in this population.

To prevent CVS symptoms, your eye doctor may have recommended the 20-20-20 rule. Basically, every 20 minutes spent using a screen, you should try to look away at something that is 20 feet away for a total of 20 seconds. Although you could measure out a 20' distance from your computer screen and/or television screen, all you need to do is to gaze at something farther away (like looking out a window) for 20 seconds. You could even turn it into a mindful activity, taking a break every 20 minutes, gazing outside while taking a few deep breaths. Additionally, you could get up from your desk, stretch, walk around while looking at something other than a screen for 20 seconds. There even are apps that helpful to remind you to take a break (Eye Care 20-20-20 or Eye Reliever).

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In addition to the 20-20-20 rule, consider some of these eye ergonomic strategies to reduce eye strain. Position your screen approximately an arm's length away, and oriented so that you are looking slightly downward. Keep your screen clean, at a dimmed setting and consider adding a screen filter. Having great eye ergonomics and the 20-20-20 rule mastered will help prevent eye strain and CVS. The 20-20-20 rule is good for your eyes and if you choose to stand up when your timer goes off in 20 minutes, it will be good for your body too.

So, if you are reading this article on a device, once you finish reading, rest and refresh your eyes. Get up, walk into another room, look out the window and enjoy a glass of water. No one should bat an eye!

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