Computer Vision Syndrome

By Thomas P. Finley, OD

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Dr. Finley received his Bachelor of Science degree from St. Francis College in Pennsylvania, and his Doctorate of Optometry from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry. Following graduation, he served as an optometrist in the U.S. Air Force and was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal and the Commendation Medal.

Dr. Finley has served as an adjunct clinical professor for three optometry schools and has been a clinical investigator for two major contact lens companies. He has published several articles in professional and trade journals and local newspapers, as well as lectured at many conferences throughout the area.

Dr. Finley is a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, a Fellow of the Virginia Academy of Optometry, and a member of the American Optometric Association, Virginia Optometric Association, Northern Virginia Optometric Society, and Armed Forces Optometric Society. He is an Advisory Board member for TLC Laser Eye Centers, and area Administrator for Vision Source, a national network of independent optometrists.

Locally, Dr. Finley serves as an active member of the Herndon Rotary Club (past president), Chamber of Commerce (past board member), Optimist Club (youth sports coach), Knights of Columbus (past board member), and current board member for the Jeannie Schmidt Free Clinic. He was awarded Herndon's "Distinguished Service Award," the Chamber of Commerce's "Small Business of the Year Award," and The Times Newspapers "Best Eye Doctor Award." He has owned his practice in Herndon since 1989.

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Everyone uses computers today. The more we use them, the more our eyes become strained and fatigued. Studies predict nearly 88 percent of computer users will develop computer vision syndrome (CVS).

Computer Vision Syndrome

Computer Vision Syndrome usually occurs in people using a computer more than two hours per day. It is caused from continuous uninterrupted focusing of the eyes on a computer monitor. Symptoms of CVS includes:

• Headaches

• Loss of focus

• Burning, watery, red, and tired eyes

• Blurred vision or double vision

• Eye twitching or quivering

• Eye fatigue and a sensation of heaviness

• Neck, shoulder and back pain, and muscle spasms

CVS has been called today's number one occupational hazard. CVS can result in decreased productivity and increased number of work errors.

Reducing Computer Eyestrain

Below are guidelines to help minimize the risk of CVS.

Comprehensive Eye Examination: Computer users should have a thorough eye examination every year. Your exam should include tests to make certain your eyes are balanced and see well far away, up close, and at your normal computer working distance, as well as making certain your eyes are healthy. Measure the distance from your eyes to the middle of your computer monitor before your exam and tell your eye doctor. Stress relieving computer glasses to reduce CVS can make your vision sharper and more comfortable and help with office productivity.

Use Proper Lighting: Room lighting should be at a comfortable level and not too bright. Excessive brightness can cause eyestrain. Dim the lights if necessary. Control exterior light by closing drapes or blinds. Position your monitor so that windows are to the side instead of in front or behind.

Minimize Glare: Glare and reflections on your computer screen can also cause eyestrain. If you can see your reflection in your monitor, you probably have a glare problem. Glare and reflections force your eyes to work harder. If you wear eyeglasses, have non-glare lenses to minimize annoying reflections. Adjust the brightness of your computer screen for best contrast and optimal visual comfort. The best color combination for your eyes is black text on a white background, or dark on light combinations.

Blink More Often: As silly as it seems, blinking is very important when doing computer work. Blinking produces tears that rewet our eyes and prevent dryness and gritty irritation. People tend to blink about 5 times less when working at a computer. Supplementing your normal tears with over the counter artificial tears helps prevent dryness and keeps your eyes feeling refreshed and comfortable.

Take Vision Breaks: About every 5-10 minutes, look away from your computer and across the room at a distant object for 5-10 seconds. This relaxes your eye focus. Take a ten minute alternate task break every hour. Giving your eyes these needed breaks helps prevent chronic fatigue.

Adjust Your Workstation: Position your monitor at least 20 inches away from your eyes. Place your monitor so that the top of it is at eye level to avoid additional dryness. Good ergonomics is important.

Although computers make our lives easier and more efficient, they place a large strain on our eyes and vision. The above tips will help prevent CVS.