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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Screen time can lead to eyestrain in kids

A growing children's health concern could literally be staring you in the face.

Youths can suffer from eyestrain caused by using digital screens to do homework, read or play games. Symptoms include dry or red eyes, blurred vision, light sensitivity, headache and neck pain.

As children today become more "plugged in," the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents to keep an eye on their children's vision.

One study found that children may be at greater risk for symptoms of eyestrain than grown-ups because many computer workspaces are arranged to serve adults. The best viewing height for a computer screen is 15 degrees below the line of vision. While adults look slightly down at a computer, a child who is shorter has to look up at an uncomfortable angle. In addition, a child can strain his or her neck and back when using a keyboard or chair that has been positioned for an adult.

Many children also play video games for hours on end and ignore eye discomfort, which can worsen symptoms.

Here's how you can prevent your child from getting eyestrain:

- Make sure your home computer workspace fits your child.
- Dim room lighting when using a digital screen.
- Encourage your child to sit with good posture, at least 20 inches from large screens.
- Remind your child to take a break at least every 20 minutes.
- Avoid using screens right before bedtime. The light from the screen can disrupt a child's ability to fall asleep.
- The AAP recommends that parents limit the amount of time their child spends on electronic devices to under two hours per day. Children under age 2 should be as "screen-free" as possible.

Lastly, the AAP recommends eye examinations at every well-child visit, beginning at birth. Although many pediatricians and schools offer vision screening, about 40% of patients do not get follow-up treatment. Even eye problems in very young children can be treated or corrected. Contact your doctor if you notice any changes in your child's eyes or viewing habits.



— Mary McGrath

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