More screen time during pandemic can lead to eye strain
by Nora Crumley, Editorial Intern

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children are spending more time than ever on digital devices to learn, connect with family and friends, and for entertainment. Parents might be worried about how all of that screen time is affecting their child's eyes.

Staring at screens for hours on end can lead to eye strain, blurry vision and dry eyes. However, there are ways to prevent those problems.

"There's no need to worry about educational screen time during the pandemic if you arrange breaks between assignments, encourage outdoor play whenever safe and limit daily entertainment screen time to two hours a day or less," said Geoffrey Bradford, M.D., M.S., FAAP, a pediatric ophthalmologist.

The following tips also can help.

Monitor screen time. Make sure the digital world does not interfere with other important activities like sleep and exercise.

- **Sleep.** Lack of sleep can lead to tired eyes. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children do not keep devices in their bedrooms so they aren't tempted to use them past bedtime. Some studies also suggest that blue light from screens could make it hard to fall asleep. Special glasses that filter the blue light may help children fall asleep and reduce eye strain. Turning devices off one hour before bed also helps - and doesn't cost anything.

- **Exercise.** Getting some exercise can give children's eyes a break from screens. Playing outside also can help their vision. It's a chance to focus on different distances and be in the sunlight.

Take breaks. Use a timer to remind children to put down screens for at least 10 minutes every hour. The American Optometric Association recommends the 20/20/20 rule: Look away from the screen every 20 minutes,
and focus on an object at least 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.

**Blink often.** Encourage your child to blink to prevent dry eyes. Eye drops or a room humidifier also can ease dry eyes.

**Position screens properly.** Set up a child's computer screen slightly below eye level. Looking up at a screen dries eyes out quicker. Some experts suggest the 1/2/10 rule: Position smartphones 1 foot away from the eyes, desktop devices/laptops 2 feet and TV screens around 10 feet.

**Focus on lighting.** Don't let light from windows, lamps and overhead fixtures shine directly on the screen. Also, decrease the screen's brightness.

**Get regular vision screenings.** The AAP recommends children have their eyes checked regularly by a pediatrician starting at birth. If the doctor finds a problem with your child's vision, you may be referred to a pediatric ophthalmologist.

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