

Staring at screens can cause eye strain. Here's tips to prevent that

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Millions of people spend hours looking at screens every day, straining

their eyes.

An ophthalmologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston offers some tips for easing both [eye strain](#) and headaches.

"We focus on one object, especially an object that's up close, like a computer screen or phone, for prolonged periods of time, and we don't give our eye muscles time to rest," said Dr. Masih Ahmed, an assistant professor of ophthalmology at Baylor.

"If you don't give your muscles enough time to rest, that can cause some tension of those muscles," Ahmed explained.

Dry eye can also cause eye strain, as you subconsciously blink less when reading, watching TV or working on the computer.

Follow the 20-20-20 rule when working in front of a screen, Ahmed suggested.

Take a 20-second break every 20 minutes to focus on something 20 feet away to give your eyes a rest. And use artificial tears if you have [dry eyes](#).

Prolonged eyestrain can give you a headache. If you wear corrective lenses, make sure you have the proper prescription, he advised.

If you have an astigmatism, you won't see as sharply. This might require more focus and energy, leading to eye strain.

"You might squint more trying to get that pinhole effect for things to look clearer. Astigmatism can also make things look distorted in shape if your astigmatism is not corrected," Ahmed noted in a Baylor news release.

Get a good fit

Glasses that sit too tight on your temples can also give you a headache.

Make sure your glasses always fit well. Stronger prescription glasses are thicker on the edge. This can cause distortion for the vision on the edge of the glasses.

"Because they sit further off your eye, they may require more power of your muscles in the eye to be able to focus on close tasks whereas [contact lenses](#) sit on your eye, so that decreases the amount of focusing power that you may need," Ahmed noted.

"Contacts give you that full vision, whereas glasses stop right there and, the edge, especially thicker ones, can be tougher to see through," he explained.

Consider getting surgery like Lasik if your glasses or contacts give you pain. That can give you your best corrected vision without needing glasses or contacts.

When adults reach ages 40 to 50, the ability to focus up close diminishes. At that point, you might need reading glasses to avoid squinting and eye strain.

"When you put on reading glasses, the whole [glass](#) you're looking through is meant for that power for you to read through so that makes it a little easier because you're not having to look down through that bifocal or progressive part of the lens," Ahmed said.

Lighting is key

Lighting can also make a big difference. The room and computer screen light should be similar if you're working in front of a monitor, he said. It can be helpful to have a backlight behind your [computer screen](#) to provide a softer glow.

Your eyes can be strained by sitting in a dark room with a bright screen.

"This becomes more common as we work on computers and spend time with screens. Dry eye has increased, and eye strain symptoms have increased as well, so make sure you take frequent breaks and work in a well-lit space," Ahmed said.

More information: The American Academy of Ophthalmology has [more](#) on preventing eye strain.

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