

Visual Hygiene and the Efficient Work Station



Many visual difficulties, such as myopia (nearsightedness), focusing, and eye teaming dysfunctions are a result of stress on the visual system. Though there are genetic predispositions to certain conditions, the majority of vision problems are actually adaptations that an individual has made in order to cope with the near visual demands of society.

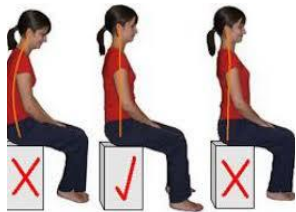
Our culture places a significant emphasis on near point tasks such as reading, writing, and working on a computer screen, which often creates stress in the visual system. This stress, especially when coupled with prolonged TV time, or accessing electronic devices, accounts for the increase in vision problems we now see. While we cannot eliminate or avoid these tasks, we can follow certain guidelines to reduce the stress while engaged in these activities.

The following suggestions minimize the stress, and strain of prolonged visual tasks, and may prevent the development of vision problems.

1. Use Adequate Working Distance

For reading, writing, and computer work, it is important to maintain an adequate working distance of at least 16" for adults, and at least 13" for children.

The work surface should be at elbow height. Avoid reading or working on electronic devices in bed, but if necessary, do it only when sitting upright and using a lap desk.



2. Maintain Good Posture

Good posture is necessary if a proper working distance is to be maintained. Reading or writing while lying down, or in other inappropriate postures results in the materials being held too close.

3. Use Good Lighting

Make sure there is good lighting on close work, and good general illumination in the room. To avoid glare, lighting from behind one's shoulder is best. Position the light so the bulb cannot be seen directly. The best source of light is natural daylight; however, since most of us use artificial light, we suggest "full spectrum" bulbs.

4. Take Breaks

Read or study no longer than 20 to 30 minutes without a break. Get up and walk around, get a drink, or look out a window. Such movement tends to reduce tension in the body, and the visual system. Place a bookmark a few pages ahead or set a timer to remind you to take a break. As you read, look up and away at a distant object as you turn each page. Try to get the distant object clear. We urge you to relax and let it clear rather than trying to force it by squinting. Shifting focus from near to far while reading reduces the tendency for the focusing system to become cramped. For this reason, it is not wise to place the desk facing the wall.

5. Limit Screen Time

Limit time spent looking at flat screens; computer, TV, smart phone, and video games. Handheld video games, and smart phones are especially hard on our eyes and encourage tunnel vision. Playing outside can reverse the negative, stressful effects of looking at flat screens, so we recommend an hour of play outside for every 15-20 minutes of screen time.

6. Use the Correct Pencil Grip

When writing, hold your pencil or pen at least an inch from the tip, so that you can see the point without having to tilt your head or body to the side. Learn to use a relaxed grip so your body does not feel tense.

7. Use a Slant-Top Work Surface

Our visual system, as well as our body, receives tremendous benefit from an inclined work surface. A slant board can be purchased or constructed.

The easiest design is to purchase a small piece of interior plywood (24x18) and screw two door stops into the back edge. A clip at the top, or a strip of molding at the bottom edge may be added to help prevent papers from sliding off. The work surface should be a matte, off white or natural wood color so it does not produce a glare.

8. Maintain Good TV Viewing Distance

Do not sit any closer to the TV than necessary. A minimum of 8 feet is usually best. There should be some lights on in the room, but be sure they do not create glare on the screen. Sit upright and maintain good posture.



9. Practice Using Peripheral Vision

Make a practiced effort to be consciously aware of your surroundings while you look toward an object, be it a person, print on the page, TV, computer screen or any other object.

When walking outdoors, look into the distance at eye level and be aware of the ground and where things are to either side. When riding in a car, avoid reading, playing handheld games, and other near activities. Learn to enjoy looking at the sights in the distance.

10. Play Outside

Increase outdoor activities that require seeing beyond arm's length. To counteract the negative, stressful effects of near work, go outside to play or walk. Looking beyond arms reach is restful for the eyes, stretching the muscles that focus and move the eyes.

