

Maintaining Your Eye Health as we Shelter in Place-Part One

Submitted by Connie Serror, BSN, BEd, Coordinator, Health and Wellness Ministry

Since the advent of COVID-19, we are more immersed in digital technology use than we were even 3 months ago. We now find ourselves working from home, helping our children continue their education in an online format, conducting digital business meetings and staying in touch via video chats with friends and relatives. The hours spent looking at our computer, smartphone, television, or other digital devices can lead to sore, tired, burning, or itching eyes. These are all signs of eye strain, also known as **C**omputer **V**ision **S**yndrome (CVS). Other symptoms can include headaches, dry or watery eyes, and blurred or double vision, to name a few.

CVS occurs because we tend to blink less frequently when doing screen work. Normally, we blink 15 times/min. Prolonged screen time decreases that rate to a half or a third that often, leading to eye strain.

Since digital technology is here to stay, we need to take steps to defend our eye health. The **20-20-20 rule** can help. Studies have shown that this practice dramatically decreases symptoms of eye strain. So, what is it?

Basically, this practice involves taking a break from looking at a screen:

- Every **20 minutes**: Set a timer to remind you; it's easy to get caught up looking at a screen. (Free apps like [EyeCare 20 20 20](#) can also be used to remind you to take that break.)
- Focus **20 feet away**: find an object across the room or outside a window to look at,
- For **20 seconds**: it takes at least that long for your eyes to fully relax.

Lastly, **Move!** Digital screen use is usually a sedentary activity; so when that timer goes off, (or at least every hour,) get up and move to grab a drink of water. Keeping your body hydrated, will do the same for your eyes.

Note: You might opt for a green tea beverage. It contains catechins (antioxidants) that help your eyes produce more tears, keeping eyes more lubricated.

While it can be uncomfortable or even severe at times, eye strain from screen use will likely not cause permanent vision damage. These symptoms should subside once you rest your eyes; but remember, it's always a good idea to report any changes in your vision or eye health to your doctor.

One last note to caregivers: Children do not notice eye strain as much as adults so their screen time should be closely monitored. The same **20-20-20 rule** applies to them.

Stay tuned for more suggestions on dealing with other health challenges we face as we continue to shelter in place.