allaboutEYES
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EYE SAFETY **Cut the risk**

Eye injuries can occur while carrying out everyday tasks such as mowing a lawn or gardening but a high percentage of injuries occur in the workplace and are commonly caused by flying particles from grinding or welding.

Workers who wear standard spectacles are often lulled into a false sense of security, thinking their eyes are sufficiently protected. Prescription spectacles are designed to correct vision; they are not safety glasses.

Taking simple precautions and making sure you have appropriate eye protection for the type of work you are doing is the best way of reducing risk.

- Safety glasses may look like regular spectacles but the lenses are tougher and provide better protection against flying debris. If you have a vision problem, you can use specially made safety spectacles that have corrective lenses.
- Safety goggles fit snugly around your eyes and may offer an extra level of protection above that provided by safety glasses.
- Eye shields cover your upper face and have much the same function as goggles but are less likely to fog. Face shields cover your entire face. You can wear corrective spectacles or contact lenses beneath these shields.
- Helmets or goggles with special filters are available, which provide greater protection for welders or those who work with lasers.

Be aware of people around you when carrying out potentially harmful tasks. All hazards can affect those walking past or helping you perform a task who are not wearing appropriate eye protection.

If you think you could be at risk of a work-related eye injury, you can seek advice from your optometrist.

Cosmetics can carry bugs

Make-up can enhance appearance but products such as mascara can become a breeding ground for germs and bacteria that can cause eye infections. Old mascara and other eye make-up can be unsafe for our eyes because, just like food, some cosmetics have a use-by date and can become dangerous to use.

The more moisture a product contains, the more it is able to harbour bacteria so it is best to discard mascara and liquid eye-liner after three months. Powders can be kept longer, eye shadow for 12 months and eye pencil for up to two years.

Avoid applying mascara while moving, especially in a car. Scratching the eye with a mascara wand is a common injury that can lead to an eye infection.

It is important not to share eye make-up because tear ducts carry viruses that can cause colds and 'flu. Make-up applied on the inside edge of your eyelid can block the tiny glands, which in turn can cause sties and dry eyes.

Wash and dry your hands thoroughly before applying your make-up to minimise the transfer of harmful bacteria from your fingers to your eyes.

Insert contact lenses prior to applying your make-up. Keeping your contact lenses clean is vital to avoid infection. It also makes it easier to see the make-up you are applying and prevents make-up getting underneath your lenses.

Take your make-up off before going to bed at night. Eye make-up can make its way into your eyes while you are sleeping.

Although our defence system naturally fights bacteria, it is wise to discard old make-up regularly to avoid bacteria accumulating and risking eye infection.

Stay alert behind the wheel

Ninety per cent of the critical decisions made by drivers are based on sight so good vision is important for you and your family's road safety.

Your eyes are a great indicator of how tired you are. Driving for long hours without rest causes eye strain, eye fatigue and increased sensitivity to glare. Watch out for the tell-tale signs of blurred vision and sore or heavy eyes. The best way to overcome eye fatigue is to pull over, close your eyes and rest.

There are other things you can do to manage eye fatigue, too.

Take sufficient breaks. A change of scenery and fresh air will go a long way to helping your eyes relax. Using artificial tear supplements recommended by your optometrist will keep your eyes lubricated and may help with tired or dry eyes.

Sufficient, good-quality sleep before driving, and keeping your sleeping and waking patterns regular will ensure your eyes are well-rested and ready for a long journey. Avoid driving during times when you would ordinarily sleep—your eyes will notice the difference.

Wear sunglasses to reduce glare and squinting while driving. If you are sensitive to glare, antireflective spectacle lenses may help during the day and at night.

Even if you think you have good vision, you could have an underlying vision problem that makes your eyes feel excessively tired. Most eye conditions can be managed or corrected if detected early. An optometrist can tell you if spectacles or contact lenses should be prescribed for driving, which may help to reduce eye strain.

Blepharitis can stick around

Blepharitis is an inflammation of the eyelids. Crusting of the eyelids is common with the condition; other symptoms may be a gritty or burning sensation in the eyes, excessive tearing, itching, red and swollen eyelids, and dry eyes.

Your optometrist can confirm whether you have blepharitis by examining your eyes with a special microscope called a slitlamp. The particular type and cause of your blepharitis will determine the right treatment plan for you.

In most cases, an important part of controlling blepharitis involves treatment at home. This may include warm compresses,

which can be applied to loosen the crusts, followed by gentle scrubbing of the eyes with a mixture of water and baby shampoo or an over-the-counter lid-cleansing product. Lubricating eye-drops and vitamin supplements may be recommended to promote ongoing eye health and comfort. In many cases, good eyelid hygiene and regular cleaning can control the condition.

Blepharitis is commonly caused by normal bacteria that live on the skin, or other skin conditions such as acne rosacea. It may also result from allergies or irregular oil production by the eyelids' glands.

Limiting or stopping the use of eye make-up when treating blepharitis may be recommended and if you wear contact lenses, you may have to temporarily discontinue wearing them during treatment.

Take a break from the computer

Most people are familiar with the problems that can arise from staring at a computer monitor for long periods—eyestrain, tired eyes, irritation, redness, blurred vision, double vision and headaches.

Light emitted from computer screens does not damage your eyes but if you have an underlying vision problem, you are more susceptible to symptoms of vision fatigue. Longsightedness, presbyopia and astigmatism are common vision problems that can cause eyestrain and reduced efficiency when doing computer work.

A mildly longsighted person who is generally able to perform tasks such as driving without prescription spectacles may require them to overcome blurred vision or vision discomfort when working at a computer.

Presbyopia, usually first noticed in the mid-40s, reduces a person's ability to focus clearly on close work, especially over extended periods.

Astigmatism is a vision disorder that can cause blurry vision at all distances but has been found to be more significant when doing detailed, close work, such as when reading on a computer screen.

Other vision problems like shortsightedness and ocular co-ordination problems can also cause symptoms at the computer. When people cannot focus easily on their computer screen, they tend to lean forward and adopt a poor posture, which in turn causes more eyestrain—and a cycle can result.

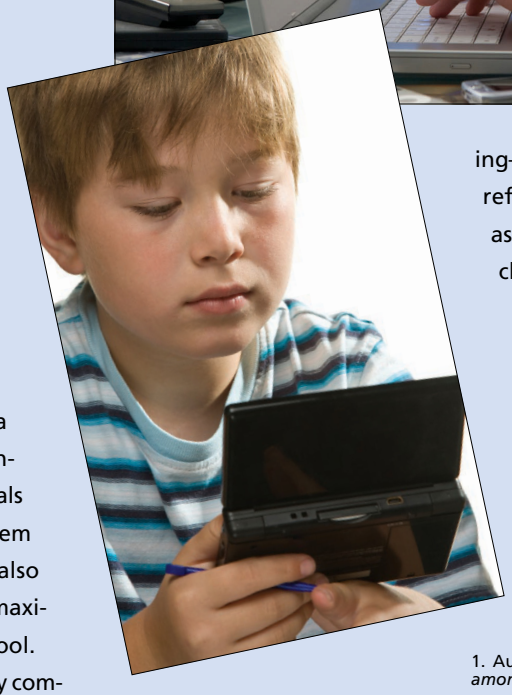
Fortunately, most vision problems that cause computer-related eyestrain can be easily managed with corrective spectacles or contact lenses. In many cases, spectacles worn when using a computer may be all that is required to prevent symptoms and increase productivity. Wearing appropriate corrective lenses while at the computer can also help the eyes feel more comfortable and relaxed, even after work.

Have an eye examination prior to starting a computer-based occupation and regularly throughout your career to make sure your eyes are fit for the task.

Monitor your child's screen time

Children are spending more time interacting with digital screens when working on computers, playing video games or watching television. With one in 10 Australian children suffering from a long-term eye disorder,[1] it is important to be aware of the signs of a vision problem.

If your child uses a computer for more than two hours a day, they are likely to experience eye strain. Symptoms may include blurred or double vision, loss of focus, burning or tired eyes, headaches or neck and shoulder pain. An observant parent is often the first person to detect signs of a vision problem in a child. Teaching your child the fundamentals of eye care will not only help them maintain good vision, it will also enable them to achieve their maximum learning potential at school.



To reduce eye strain caused by computer monitors, have even room lighting—not too bright, not too dark—and minimise reflections from the monitor. Children should sit as far back from the screen as practical. Get your child to stand upright every 20 minutes.

New government guidelines[2] suggest that children under five should spend no more than one hour watching television or other electronic media per day.

Just like adults, children need to have regular eye examinations because there are many eye conditions that have no immediately obvious symptoms.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. *Eye health among Australian children*. Cat. No. PHE 105. Canberra: AIHW.
2. www.health.gov.au. *Get Up & Grow: Healthy eating and physical activity for early childhood*. 2009.

Telemedicine gets results faster

Telemedicine is the use of electronic or digital telecommunications by health professionals to provide care for their patients. It is becoming increasingly common in optometry as it allows health professionals to work together for the benefit of their patients.

Distance is no barrier for telemedicine to work effectively because information such as test results can be sent electronically for immediate delivery and analysis. A common scenario involves sending information from one location to another where a consulting specialist can review the data.

An optometrist can use a camera or other highly specialised equipment to capture images of the inside of your eye. The images can be sent via the internet to an eye specialist to confirm the optometrist's diagnosis of conditions such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy or age-related macular degeneration.

The use of telemedicine technology by health professionals with different areas of expertise enables quicker diagnosis, which means more chance of successful treatment. It also offers the patient greater convenience by minimising the need to travel to see a specialist.

Telemedicine provides an adjunct to face-to-face health care by improving efficiency in patient management.

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