Signaling Screen Strain

How many hours do you log on the computer every week? If you're like a lot of Americans, it's a ton. From computer-dependent jobs to fun time surfing the net, our eyes are focused on computer screens – probably too much.

The result? You could face an actual medical condition called Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). We talked with Stephen Glasser, O.D., who specializes in treating CVS, to get some facts about symptoms that could signal CVS versus run-of-the-mill tired eyes. And, he also shares the easy steps to treat it.

The Washington, D.C., optometrist says, "If you're experiencing two or more of these symptoms daily, you can be pretty sure you're struggling with computer eye strain:"

- **Blurred vision.** It tops the list. When you shift your focus from the computer screen to things further away, you could notice actual blurred vision or a delay in focusing your eyes.
- **Dry eyes**. If you feel like there's something in your eyes you just can't get rid of, or burning, stinging and inflammation, your eyes are probably dry.
- **Eyestrain.** Vague eye discomfort you can't quite put your finger on or that makes you squint or frown when you're at the computer could be eyestrain.
- **Glare sensitivity.** If your monitor is too dark or bright, your eyes are working too hard to see it and can get tired.
- **Headaches** — and not just those in the eye area — could be a sign you have computer eye strain.
- **Neck and shoulder pain.** Like eyestrain, other bodily aches could signal ergonomic problems in your workstation.

So, if these symptoms hit a little close to home, here are some things you can do to treat CVS:

- **Keep blinking.** It washes your eyes in naturally therapeutic tears.
- **20-20-20.** Remember, every 20 minutes spend 20 seconds looking at something 20 feet away, minimum.
- **Right light.** Good lighting isn't just flattering – it's healthy for your eyes. So, keep bright lighting overhead to a minimum. Keep your desk lamp shining on your desk, not you. Try to keep window light off to the side, rather than in front or behind you. Use blinds and get a glare screen.
- **Monitor you monitor.** Keep it at least 20 inches from your eyes. Center should be about four to six inches below your eyes. Also, make sure it's big enough and with just the right brightness and contrast.
- **Computer specs.** Your doctor can prescribe a pair of glasses just for seeing the computer screen well.
- **Talk to your doc.** "We hear about computer eyestrain every day from our patients," says Dr. Glasser. "Your eye doctor can recommend solutions such as adjustments to your office environment, special eyewear, eye drops or a combination approach. Also, a thorough eye exam may reveal that your computer vision problems are related to a different condition that needs treatment."