



This week...

Give Your Eyes a Break!

Would you agree that most people are somewhat addicted to their screens? Just look around at people in the dog park, walking down the street, or on the bus. People are interacting more with their phones than with each other.

Did you know that adults are estimated to spend more than 10 hours a day in front of screens?¹ Researchers are discovering what physical and emotional effects excessive screen time can have on us. As screen time activities are mainly sedentary, this exposure has been linked to higher rates of obesity and diabetes.²

Research has identified that screen time has a **negative** health effect on the following:

1. **Vision.** Staring into a screen for extended periods of time can cause computer vision syndrome. Symptoms can include strained, dry eyes, blurred vision, and headaches. Poor posture also causes neck and shoulder pain.
2. **Sleep.** Studies link heavy computer and mobile phone use to more sleep disturbances. The blue light from digital devices suppresses the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, keeping us from having a restful sleep.

To be healthy and happy, we need to meet our basic human needs. These needs include sleep, physical activity, a healthy diet, and social interaction. If screen time is interfering with meeting any of these needs, you may experience problems with your physical and mental health.

REDUCE YOUR SCREEN TIME

Here are some tips for reducing screen time at work and home:

- **Track your screen time for a few days.** Monitor how much screen time you generate and where it is being spent. This can be very insightful as people tend to underestimate the amount of time they spend on electronic devices.
- **Keep yourself accountable.** With a group of friends, family, or colleagues, make an agreement to keep each other accountable about reducing screen time.
- **Turn off notifications.** A simple, yet valuable, step is to turn off notifications. It is hard to focus when your phone is constantly buzzing with notifications from messages or social media platforms.
- **Create a phone-free space.** A phone-free space could be intentionally set up by designating activities and times where devices are not used. This could simply mean putting devices away during a break at work, during conversations and activities with friends, and during meals. When it's time to sleep, it's best not to bring your phone to bed. If you must, set it to airplane or do-not-disturb mode.
- **Go outside during work breaks.** Put the phone down and take a walk outdoors to boost your mood and physical health.
- **Disconnect to connect.** Quality time with people in your life is important — there's no app for that. Have a coffee or a quick *audio* phone call with a friend.

REDUCE YOUR EYE STRAIN

Here are some ways to reduce the strain of screens on your eyes:

- For every 20 minutes you spend near a screen, stare at an object 20 feet away from you for 20 seconds.
- Place your computer and laptop screen 20 to 26 inches away from your eyes and a little below eye level.
- Reduce any glare or reflection on your screen. Ideally, your light source should be to the side, not behind or above your screen. Where possible, turn off overhead lights.
- Adjust your screen settings by enlarging the font size or adjusting the contrast and brightness to a comfortable level. Turn on the blue light filters on your phone.
- Blink often to keep the eyes moist and healthy. We tend to blink less when looking at screens. Use eyedrops to refresh your eyes when they feel dry.

- Get enough sleep as sleep deprivation can contribute to more frequent eye strain.
- Wear sunglasses when going out in the sun during the day.
- Get your eyes checked regularly by a specialist to make sure your eyes are healthy and prescription eyewear is up to date.

RELIEVE YOUR TIRED EYES

Here are some suggestions to ease your eye strain:³

Cold water

- Splash cold water on your face when your eyes feel strained or tired. This will quickly relax your eyes.
- For a more concentrated remedy, dip a soft washcloth in cold water and wring it out. Place the cold washcloth on your closed eyelids for 1 minute. Repeat as needed.

Palming Technique

1. Sit up straight in a comfortable position.
2. Warm your hands by rubbing them together rapidly.
3. Close your eyes and place your warm palms over them, without applying pressure on the eyelids.
4. Relax and enjoy the darkness for about 30 seconds.
5. Slowly open your eyes and look around.
6. Repeat the process three to five times per sitting.
7. Follow this technique frequently throughout the day.

Warm Compress

A warm compress is another way to reduce eye strain. It relaxes the muscles around your eyes, reduces strain, and soothes dry eyes. Dip a clean, soft cloth in warm water and wring it out.

1. Lie down comfortably, close your eyes, and place the warm cloth over your eyelids.
2. Relax and breathe slowly for 1 minute.
3. Repeat the process three or four times.
4. Follow this treatment one or two times daily.
5. You can also add 2-3 drops of menthol on the compress for a soothing effect.

See what a difference less screen time can make? For more remedies, check out [this website!](#)

If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the [ReFresh](#) series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources:

1. [Harvard T. H. Chan School Of Public Health](#)
2. [Centre for Anxiety Disorders](#)
3. [Top 10 Home Remedies](#)