Need to Know
MemberOne Credit Union
Staff Newsletter

May 2014: Gimme a (Vision) Break!

Let's face it: we spend the entire day on the computer. That's just over seven hours squinting at a computer screen, broken up only by lunch, breaks, or human interaction – and that's not accounting for the time spent at home on the computer and using our smartphones or tablets in transit. While those of us who had computers as a regular part of everyday life can remember the all-night essay-writing marathons, weekend-long video game sessions, or binge-watching TV series in their entirety online, even we must admit that our eyes aren't what they used to be. Just like keeping proper posture or setting up components of our desks and workstations to ideal heights and levels that keep us comfortable, it's important to keep our eyes from unnecessary strain – especially now that technology is just as much a constant part of our work lives as well as our recreation.

Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) describes a set of vision-related problems stemming from prolonged computer use, with the greatest risk posed to persons who spend two or more continuous hours at a computer daily. The most commonly reported symptoms are strained eyes, headaches, blurred vision, difficulty refocusing, dry eyes, and neck and shoulder pain. These may be caused by a combination of any of the following:

- Poor lighting
- Glare on your computer screen
- Improper viewing distances (too close or too far)
- Poor seating posture
- Uncorrected vision problems

In most cases, CVS symptoms occur because the visual demands of a computer-related task exceed the visual abilities of the person performing it. Viewing a computer screen makes the eyes work harder; type is not rendered as crisply as on paper, there is less contrast between the letters and their background. Reflections and glare on the screen also make it difficult to view things properly. When we work off of reference material, the distances and angles at which we view these things cause the eye to have to move and focus differently than it would for other tasks like reading or writing. Sometimes our own glasses and contact lens prescriptions are not optimized for computer viewing; in order to compensate, we tilt our heads or lean forward towards the screen at odd angles, which may cause muscle spasms or pain in the neck, shoulder, and back.

To reduce the effects of CVS, it's important to ensure that your workstation is optimized for computer use – everything from the distance and angle of your monitor from your eyes and the lighting in your workstation to the setup of your chair and ensuring you're able to sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor helps to reduce the symptoms of extended computer work.

One very important step we can take to reduce eye strain is to take frequent vision breaks. This is more than merely stopping what we're doing every time we feel our eyes start to burn; rather, vision breaks are scheduled to make sure that our eyes are not holding the same potentially uncomfortable viewing stance for too long. For every **twenty minutes** of computer viewing, turn away from your screen and focus on something in the distance – approximately **20 feet** away – for **twenty seconds**. For every **two hours** of continuous computer use, take a **fifteen-minute** break – work on filing or other tasks away from your computer, or take a quick walk. Frequent **blinking** also refreshes the surface of the eye and keeps it moist. If you need a reminder, various applications and websites like ProtectYourVision.org can set up vision break reminders that pop up at appointed times.

No matter how much you have on your plate, be sure to give your eyes ample time to rest and refocus. Your neck, back, shoulders, and brain will thank you!

References

"Computer Vision Syndrome." Computer Vision Syndrome. American Optometric Association, n.d. Web. 23 May 2014.