Computer Use and Eyestrain

Staring at your computer screen, smartphone, video game or other digital devices for long periods won't cause permanent eye damage, but your eyes may feel dry and tired.

What causes computer-use eyestrain?

- Normally, humans blink about 15- 20 times a minute, but studies show we blink half that often while using computers and other digital screen devices, whether for work or play.

- Extended reading, writing or other intensive "near work" can also cause eyestrain.

What to do:

- Sit about 25 inches from the computer screen and position the screen so your eye gaze is slightly downward.

- Reduce glare from the screen by lighting the area properly; use a screen filter if needed.

- Post a note that says "Blink!" on the computer as a reminder.

- Every 20 minutes, shift your eyes to look at an object at least 20 feet away, for at least 20 seconds: the "20-20-20" rule.

- Use artificial tears to refresh your eyes when they feel dry.

- Take regular breaks from computer work, and try to get enough sleep at night.

Computer-use eyestrain can be made worse by:

Sleep deprivation. When you get less sleep than you need, your eyes may become irritated. During sleep our eyes rest for an extended period and are replenished by nutrients. Ongoing eye irritation can lead to swelling and infection, especially if you wear contact lenses.

- If you have to be at your computer for a marathon work session, take regular rest breaks or "power naps," if possible.

- Apply a washcloth soaked in warm water to tired, dry eyes (with eyes closed).

- Use tired or sore eyes as a signal that it's time to stop working and get some rest or sleep.

Incorrect contact lens use. If you wear contact lenses, it's important that you use and care for them properly — especially if you use a computer and other digital-screen devices often. This helps avoid eye irritation, swelling, infection and vision problems.

- Give your eyes a break: wear your glasses!

- Don't sleep in your contact lenses, even if they are labeled "extended wear."

- Always use good cleaning practices.

There are some important things to keep in mind when cleaning your contact lenses. You should:

- Avoid touching the lenses with water; use fresh solution every time for cleaning and storing.

- Rub your contacts when you clean them, even if you use a no-rub solution.

- Clean your storage case regularly (with fresh solution, not water) and replace it every 2 to 3 months.

Stop wearing your contact lenses and see an ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) right away if you develop any of these problems: Eyes that are red, blurry, watery, sensitive to light, or sore; eye swelling or discharge