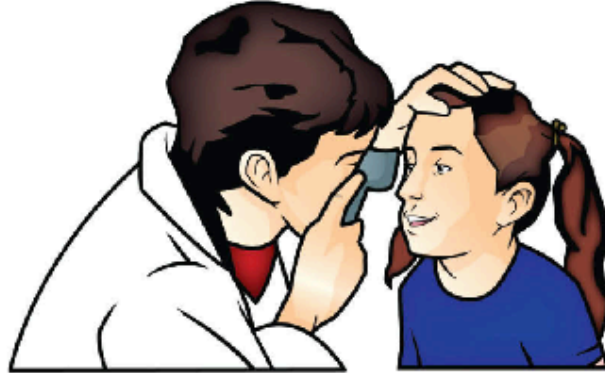


Screen time may be hurting your family's eyes: Coping with digital strain



Carrying the world in our back pockets is great for posting cute photos on Instagram and keeping up with news events that happened five minutes ago, but spending a lot of time looking at screens isn't always so hot for our eyes.

According to a recent survey, conducted by the Alberta Association of Optometrists, Albertans spend an average of 10.5 hours each day using digital devices—the little screens on our phones and bigger ones in our homes and offices. Our children too are using screens more at home and at school. With a giant rise in screen time, it's not surprising that studies show there are a growing number of visual problems.

"We are definitely seeing more people come in to the office with

symptoms of digital eye strain," says Dr. Adam Gerner. "When you spend a lot of time reading from screens or playing Candy Crush or other games online, your eyes can pay a price. While digital eye strain doesn't cause permanent damage, it can be quite uncomfortable and it can affect children as well as adults."

If you're noticing that you or your family members are having a lot of headaches, that your eyes are often sore, tired, dry or tearing, or maybe your vision is temporarily blurry, you may be experiencing digital eye strain. A visit to your doctor of optometry for a comprehensive eye exam will ensure you and your children get the eye care you need

continued on page 8

Screen time may be hurting your family's eyes: Coping with digital strain

Continued from page 7

... "Once we have examined you, we can offer treatment for any digital eye strain symptoms and give you some suggestions to avoid eye strain in the future, like adjusting the lighting around the computer and giving your eyes a break by looking at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes," says Dr. Gerner.

As kids spend less time playing outdoors and more time inside with digital devices, myopia also known as nearsightedness—is becoming more common. A 2016 study from the University of Waterloo's School of Optometry and Vision Science estimates that six per cent of Canadian children between the ages of six to eight have

myopia. For older children, between 11 and 13, it's a staggering 29 per cent who are nearsighted. For every one additional hour children spend outside, their odds of developing myopia go down by about 14 per cent.

Eye problems in children can affect their performance at school. *Eighty per cent of a child's learning is based on their vision and about a quarter of all school children have some type of a vision problem.* Many children accept their vision as normal because they don't know any different.

"We know that about 60 per cent of children who are having difficulty reading have an undiagnosed or untreated vision problem," says Dr.

Gerner. "And these issues can elicit some of the signs and symptoms that are commonly attributed to other developmental issues, such as ADHD, dyslexia, and speech problems."

That's why it's a good idea to schedule regular exams for everyone in the family, even young children. The Alberta Association of Optometrists recommends children have their first eye exam between six and nine months old and a second test between two and five. When they're in school, kids should have an eye exam every year.

While some children may receive a simple sight test or screening while they're at school, it's a more limited procedure than the comprehensive examinations that are administered by your doctor of optometry. "In fact, studies have shown that as many as 43 per cent of children with vision problems are able to pass a vision screening test," says Dr. Gerner. "All eye tests are not created equally."