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GEAR & GADGETS

How to Stop Eye Strain When You Relentlessly Stare at Screens

Now that most of work and life has gone virtual, all that screen time is causing eye pain everywhere. Here, a few fixes.



OUR EYES HAVE HAD IT! Stare at a Zoom grid for two hours and you're well on your way to a headache, or worse.

ILLUSTRATION: FERNANDO COBELLO

By Ashley Mateo

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LIFE HAS GONE almost entirely virtual. Since lockdown started, people who used to see their overly chatty co-workers IRL spend an average of 9.5 hours a day looking at laptops and smartphones, reports a survey conducted by OnePoll. It takes just two consecutive

hours of staring at pixelated Zoom faces or scrolling Excel data to put you at risk for eyestrain and dryness, blurred vision and headaches, according to the American Optometric Association.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

How do you protect your eyes from strain and fatigue? Join the conversation below.

That's because, like Pilates or making elaborate lattes, vision takes effort. Tiny eye muscles "are no different from muscles in arms or legs," said Scott P. Drexler, O.D., an assistant professor of Ophthalmology at the **University of Pittsburgh** School of Medicine. "When you overuse them, they get fatigued and hurt."

Step one: Adjust the way you engage with devices. "Your phone should always be a foot from your face; your laptop about two feet away," said Jamie Mitchell, M.D., a neuro-ophthalmologist at Manhattan Eye, Ear & Throat Hospital. Keep screens 3 to 4 inches below your sight line, added Dr. Drexler; looking slightly downward is easier on the eyes. A tilted laptop stand, like the Rain Design iLevel2 (\$60, [adorama.com](https://www.adorama.com)), lets you stick to those guidelines without sacrificing ergonomics.

Tweaking your environment can make a difference, too. Most WFH professionals have escaped the harsh lighting of offices—whose fluorescents and LEDs can overtax eyes with subtle flickering and high wattage—but you can still take steps when it comes to luminescence. Swap standard bulbs for ones like Philips EyeComfort LED lights (*from \$9/two-pack*, [philips.com](https://www.philips.com)) that don't give off glare or emit high-energy blue-light wavelengths.

That villainous blue light contributes most to focusing problems, said Dr. Drexler. It also hinders production of melatonin, the hormone that regulates your body's sleep-wake cycle. The less shut-eye you get, the less respite for your eyes, said Dr. Mitchell.

Attachable anti-glare filters, like EyeJust's light-blocking screens (*from \$35*, [eyejust.com](https://www.eyejust.com)), act as a buffer against blue light, and stop ambient light from reflecting off your computer. Blue-light-blocking glasses, like Roka's ZX-2 lenses (*from \$175*, [roka.com](https://www.roka.com)) can nix up to

42% of harmful wavelengths. For fashion-conscious Zoomers, there's even Tom Ford pairs (*from \$360, [tomford.com](https://www.tomford.com)*).

Despite these tips, doctors still recommend the 20/20/20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to look 20 feet away. That's enough time to check on the kids before your next dial-in.

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