

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE TIME YOUR CHILDREN SPEND USING ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN SCHOOL

The Wisconsin Optometric Association recommends yearly back-to-school eye exams for school-age children

MADISON, WI – According to the American Optometric Association (AOA), 83 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 17 estimate that they use an electronic device for three or more hours each day. However, the AOA's Ninth Annual American Eye-Q® survey revealed that only 40 percent of parents believe their children use an electronic device for that same amount of time. Members of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) are concerned that this significant disparity may indicate an oversight of warning signs and symptoms associated with vision problems due to technology.

Children often report experiencing burning, itchy, or tired eyes after using electronic devices for long periods of time. These are all symptoms of digital eye strain, a temporary vision condition caused by prolonged use of technology. Additional symptoms of eye strain may include headaches, fatigue, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision, or head and neck pain. While confined to home use of digital devices during the summer months, being back in the classroom significantly increases children's total use.

"When parents consider their kids' mobile consumption habits, it's understandable to overlook how much time their children spend on devices in the classroom because they're not present," explains 2014 WOA President and Platteville, WI optometrist Dr. Michael Tashner. "Each year when school starts, we see an increase in kids complaining of symptoms synonymous with eye strain. Essentially, their time on digital devices often doubles as they return to school, leading to strain on the eyes."

When it comes to protecting vision and eye health from digital eye strain, taking frequent visual breaks is important. Nearly one-third of children go a full hour while using technology before they take a visual break. Children should make sure they practice the 20-20-20 rule: when using technology or doing near work, take a 20-second break every 20 minutes and view something 20 feet away.

Additionally, children who do not normally require the use of eyeglasses may benefit from glasses prescribed specifically for intermediate distance in computer use, and children who already wear glasses may find their current prescription does not provide optimal viewing of a computer screen. Your eye doctor can provide recommendations for each individual child.

The WOA suggests the following guidelines to help prevent or reduce problems in children associated with digital eye strain:

- Check the height and position of the digital device. Computer screens should be 4-5 inches below eye level and 20-28 inches away from the eyes. Digital devices should be held a safe distance away from eyes, slightly below eye level.
- Check for glare on the screen. Windows or other light sources should not be directly visible when sitting in front of a computer monitor. If this happens, turn the desk or computer to prevent glare on the screen.
- Reduce the amount of lighting in the room to match that of the computer screen.
- Adjust font size. Increase the text size on device screen to make it easier on the eyes when reading.
- Keep blinking. Blinking keeps the front surface of the eye moist when using devices, preventing dry eye.

WOA recommends every child have an eye exam by a licensed eye doctor soon after 6 months of age and before age 3. "Parents should know that school vision screenings miss too many children who should be referred to an eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam," advises Dr. Tashner. Eye exams performed by an eye doctor are the only way to diagnose visual diseases and disorders in children. Undiagnosed vision problems can impair learning while causing vision loss and other issues that can significantly impact a child's quality of life."

To find an optometrist in your area and schedule your child's eye examination, please visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org/members>.

About the American Eye-Q® survey

The ninth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From March 20-25, 2014, PSB conducted 1,000 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (Margin of error is plus or minus 3.10 percentage points at a 95% confidence level).

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.