

CHILDREN'S INCREASED TECHNOLOGY USE MAY LEAD TO FUTURE EYE HEALTH ISSUES

WOA recommends children have yearly comprehensive eye exams prior to the start of each school year

MADISON, Wis. – Digital technology has become an integral part of children's lives, both in the classroom and at home. According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) Tenth Annual American Eye-Q® survey, 41 percent of parents report that their kids spend three or more hours per day using digital devices, and that 66 percent of children have their own smartphone or tablet. While advances in technology may help enhance learning, many digital devices are still relatively new and the long-term effects on young eyes are still being determined.

"Today's children have had access to electronic devices their whole lives," acknowledges 2016 Wisconsin Optometric Association President and Madison, WI area optometrist Dr. Callie Enyart. "Since technology use is expected to continue to climb, we need to make sure that children and parents are aware of the visual risks associated with staring at screens for long periods of time and take the proper precautions to help alleviate eye and vision problems."

Parents should watch for signs of digital eye strain in children, which can cause burning, itchy or tired eyes, headaches, fatigue, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision, or head and neck pain. When it comes to protecting children's eyes and vision, encourage them to take frequent visual breaks by practicing 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.

Today's electronic devices also give off high-energy, short-wavelength blue and violet light which may affect vision and even prematurely age the eyes. Overexposure to blue light can contribute to eye strain and discomfort and may lead to serious conditions in later life such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which can cause blindness.

To prevent or reduce problems associated with digital eye strain in children:

- 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.
- Keep blinking. Blinking keeps the front surface of the eye moist when using devices, preventing dry eye.
- Additional information on digital eye strain can be found at <http://www.woa-eyes.org/computer-vision-syndrome-cvs>.

The 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," explains Dr. Enyart. "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 AOA American Eye-Q® survey

The tenth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From February 19 - March 4, 2015, 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.