

All the Zoom calls and screen time are bad for your eyes. Here are ways to protect your eyesight

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Long meetings are a necessary evil in most careers. Now that so many people are working from home, meetings have transitioned from in-person to online video calls. Hours and hours spent staring at your screen can strain your eyes. Every device emits blue light, which the sun also emits.

"Blue [light](#) is actually important. It's actually healthy for us; it wakes us up. There are a lot of beneficial properties. But these devices operate heavily on these wavelengths," said Dr. Robert Steinmetz, an optometrist at Solo Eye Care in Chicago. "The blue light on our devices is much less intense than the sun, but we also aren't 25 inches away from the sun for eight hours a day."

There's not enough data on the long-term effects of staring at our screens for hours, but it does significantly reduce how often people blink per minute, which can dry out your eyes. Looking at your phone all night can also create sleeping problems, messing with your circadian rhythm, the body's internal clock.

Here are five tips on how to protect your eyesight.

Abide by the 20-20-20 rule

It's important to take breaks. Steinmetz recommends the 20-20-20 rule. "Every 20 minutes on the computer, you need to look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds," said Steinmetz. "And this is shown to help alleviate eye strain and reduce stress on your ... system. That's an important one, especially for kids."

Watch out for your kids

Kids could be learning from home right alongside working parents. Increased [screen time](#) means making sure they're getting enough sleep since blue light can keep us awake.

"All of us that have children are just experiencing what it's like to have e-learning," said Steinmetz. "The most important thing as a parent is to make sure your child gets adequate sleep. We know that these devices operate in a blue-light range that can suppress melatonin. If you're going to suppress melatonin, that's been shown to give you poorer quality sleep."

Night mode really helps

As it gets later in the day, switching to a device's night mode can help. "That gives your phone a warmer hue. So it blocks out that blue light and allows for that more comfortable experience," said Steinmetz.

Night mode can work on your phone as well as your computer. It can also be set for specific times of the day, so it's a seamless transition from morning to evening. Steinmetz also recommends his patients use a free program called f.lux if it's not

installed on their devices already. It adapts the screen hue to the time of day.

Use eye drops

In terms of tools to reduce the strain of all those long video calls, Steinmetz points to eye drops. Eye strain can come from dry eyes, so drops are great for people who stare at screens for eight to 12 hours a day.

Get glasses for staring at screens

Blue light protective lenses are readily available. But some glasses offered online might have yellow or orange tints, which might not look right on a Zoom call.

"What we need is to maximize your vision by giving you a single-vision pair of glasses to maximize the height of the letters that you're looking at, comforts of that screen," said Steinmetz. "We need to get a specific prescription just for the computer that has [blue light](#) protection and an anti-reflecting coating on the front. They're inexpensive."

Prices range from \$100 to \$200, but insurance can often cover most of the cost.

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