

March Is Eye Safety Month

With so many people using computers at work and at home, complaints of eye strain, difficulty focusing and discomfort have become commonplace in doctors' offices.

One of the main reasons for this is — although offices have marched into the age of technology, not much else has. People are still using the same lighting, furniture and desk configurations they had when using typewriters.

To mark March as Workplace Eye Safety Month, the American Academy of Ophthalmology has put together some tips to help us alleviate some of the eye problems modern technology has given birth to. They are:

- First and most important — **get an eye exam** by your ophthalmologist, who can rule out the possibility of eye disease as the cause of your symptoms. You could simply need glasses when working at a computer, or your prescription might need updating;
- **Screen distance** — you should sit approximately 20 inches from the computer monitor, a little further than you would for reading distance, with the top of the screen at or below eye level.
- **Equipment** — choose a monitor that tilts or swivels, and has both contrast and brightness controls;
- **Furniture** — an adjustable chair is best;
- **Reference materials** — keep reference materials on a document holder so you don't have to keep looking back and forth, frequently refocusing your eyes and turning your neck and head;
- **Lighting** — modify your lighting to eliminate reflections or glare. A hood or micromesh filter for your screen might help limit reflections and glare; and
- **Rest breaks** — take periodic rest breaks, and try to blink often to keep your eyes from drying out.

Another thing to remember is that the forced-air heating systems in big office buildings can increase problems with dry eyes during the winter months. The usual symptoms of dry eye are stinging or burning eyes, scratchiness, a feeling that there's something in the eye, excessive tearing or difficulty wearing contact lenses.

Over-the-counter eye drops, called artificial tears, usually help, but if dry eye persists, see your eye doctor for an evaluation.

— *Lyn Wagner* —