# WORKING WITH COMPUTERS

Q   Will using a computer damage my eyes?

A   No! There is no evidence that using a computer screen can cause eye disease or damage the eyes in any way. There is also no evidence that using a computer will increase your risk of becoming short-sighted or developing any other focusing problems.

However, long spells of computer work can lead to tired eyes and discomfort, particularly if the computer is not set up properly. Also, because using a computer is a demanding task, it might make you aware of an eyesight problem you had not noticed before.
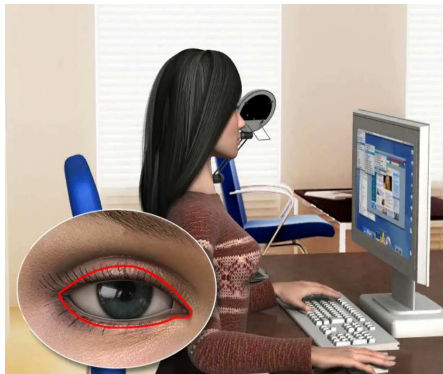
Q   How should my computer be set up?

A   Viewing your computer screen will be much more comfortable if you spend a little time ensuring that it is set up properly.

- Use a good quality screen and adjust the brightness and contrast so that it is comfortable for you.
- Position the computer screen so that it is straight in front of you and adjust the height of the screen and your chair so that your eyes are approximately level with the top of the screen.
- Make sure that there are no bright windows or lights behind your screen.
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- Make sure that there are no bright reflections on the screen from windows or lights behind you. It is

- generally best to have the screen positioned at 90 degrees to any windows in the room.
- Your computer screen will be easier to see if the room lighting is reasonably subdued. Large windows should be fitted with blinds and lights should be fitted with "shades" to avoid glare. Try turning off a few lights to find the optimum light level for you.

You should also pay attention to the positioning of your keyboard and mouse and use an adjustable chair with adequate lumbar support in order to avoid a range of musculo-skeletal problems associated with using a computer.

Q   What about breaks?

A   Using a computer can be a demanding task and it is important that you take regular breaks. Some people find it helpful to look away from the screen every 10 minutes or so and move the eyes and blink a few times (microbreaks).
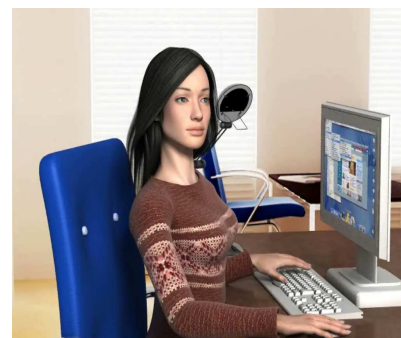
You should also get up from your desk regularly and have a longer break. These breaks should provide an opportunity to vary

your posture, relax your eyes and do something different. The frequency and length of these breaks will depend on you and the nature of the computer work that you are doing. In general, it is better to take short frequent breaks than longer less-frequent breaks.

Q **What spectacles should I wear when using a computer?**

A It depends! Your optometrist will be able to provide specific advice.

In general, you should use the same spectacles that you normally use for reading (if any). However, there are some exceptions to this rule.

- Reading glasses tend to be arranged so that you can see clearly at a normal reading distance (40 cm). If your computer screen is further away than this you may find that the screen is not clear when using these glasses. If this is the case, you could either bring your screen closer or purchase another pair of spectacles for viewing the screen.
- If you normally wear bifocal or progressive spectacles, you may find that you have to hold your head at an uncomfortable angle in order to see through the near portion of the lens. If this is the case you may need a special type of bifocal or progressive lens or a separate pair for looking at the computer screen.

Note: If you use a computer for several hours a day at work and your normal spectacles are not suitable for the purpose, your employer may be obliged to make a contribution towards a more suitable pair of glasses.

Q **What about contact lenses?**

A Most people who wear contact lenses do not have any specific problems when using a computer.

However, some wearers do complain of red or sore eyes after using a computer. This is probably due to the fact that the eyes are wide open when viewing a computer screen (whereas you tend to look down when reading a book). This combined with the dry atmosphere found in many air-conditioned offices and the tendency to blink less frequently when concentrating, can lead to the lenses becoming dry and uncomfortable. In many cases, simply remembering to blink more often can solve the problem. Increasing the humidity in the office can sometimes help while some people find re-wetting eye drops useful.

Q **What about the law?**

A Under the terms of the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, anybody who uses a computer as a significant part of their working day is entitled to an eye examination by an Optometrist paid for by their employer.

Furthermore, if your normal spectacles are not suitable for the purpose, your employer may be obliged to make a contribution towards a more suitable pair of glasses.