

VISUAL HYGIENE

The human visual system is dynamic and can adapt to its environment. Sustained nearpoint, two-dimensional visual tasks create stress and distress in the visual system of susceptible individuals causing a loss of efficiency in the way their visual system functions. This results in a variety of symptoms; including fatigue, headaches, poor concentration and reduced comprehension. It is even thought to be a major environmental factor in the development of some refractive errors. Here are a few things that you can do to modify your environment and habits for optimal performance and efficiency in the activities of daily living.

GOOD LIGHTING : Your visual task should be well lit, but care taken to avoid excessive glare or reflection.

GOOD POSTURE: Sit straight with wide shoulders. Avoid slouching or lying on your stomach.

PERIPHERAL AWARENESS: Try and maintain an awareness of the room around you – if you find you are losing this awareness, this may be a clue to the fact that you are getting tired.

MAINTAIN THE CORRECT WORKING DISTANCE: Your book should be no closer than the distance between your knuckle and your elbow (the Harmon Distance). Be aware of the space between your face and the book.

TAKE A VISUAL BREAK: Develop the habit of looking up from your page, and into the distance preferably, every second page. It is a good idea to wink each eye to check the focus of each eye independently.

TIME CYCLES IN READING OR STUDY: Be in the habit of taking a minute or two every half an hour to get up and walk around. Look into the distance and maintain an awareness of your surroundings.

2

These habits and procedures described above are a simple and powerful way of maintaining an environmental balance in a world of increasing nearpoint detail, intensity and demand. People are spending larger periods of their leisure time enjoying nearpoint recreational activities; in addition to long hours of study and computer use; this tends to reduce the amount of time people (especially young people) spend required to do critical distance viewing. The above habits should help you keep your visual world in a more appropriate balance. If you find some of the above activities difficult, a consultation with an optometrist is advisable