Visual Hygiene

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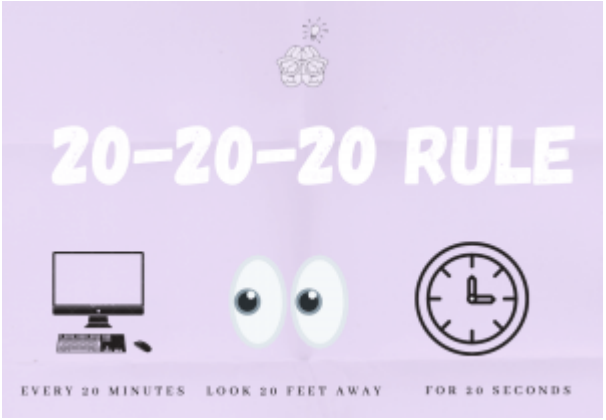
The human visual system is dynamic and can adapt to its environment. Sustained near point, two-dimensional visual tasks create stress and distress in the visual system of susceptible individuals causing a loss of efficiency in the way their visual system functions. This results in a variety of symptoms; 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.

Healthy visual hygiene habits:

- Good lighting- Your visual task should be well lit, but care taken to avoid excessive glare or reflection.
- 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 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.
- Time cycles of 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.

- Take a 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. Or you can follow the 20-20-20 rule, Every 20 minutes look about 20 feet away for 20 seconds.



These habits and procedures described above are a simple and powerful way of maintaining an environmental balance in a world of increasing near point detail, intensity and demand. People are spending larger periods of their leisure time enjoying near point 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. These 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.