

Eyestrain in the Workplace

Eyestrain, also known as “asthenopia”, is a term used to describe a range of symptoms including blurry vision, difficulty focusing, sore eyes, red eyes and headaches. Not only can these symptoms be uncomfortable for the individual, but they can also reduce productivity, increase the rate of errors and lead to absenteeism.



Just as eyestrain may present as a range of symptoms, there are also a variety of possible causes.

The Individual

If someone experiences eyestrain symptoms, the first step should be an eye examination. Small problems with focusing or with co-ordination of the eyes can be more noticeable in a work environment where the visual demands are high. The solution might be as simple as an updated pair of spectacles or a program of eye exercises.

The Task

Many aspects of the task and task design can cause visual discomfort. They include:

- The size of the detail within the task (for example, font size)
- The working distance (close working distances create a higher demand on accommodation / focusing)
- The contrast within the task (for example, the colour of text against its background)
- The position of the task relative to the eyes (for example, height of the computer monitor)

- The intensity of work
- The number and type of rest breaks

The Work Environment

Inappropriate and/or incorrect lighting can make tasks difficult to see. This includes the amount of light (illumination), the distribution of light and the presence of glare sources.

Air quality (in particular, humidity) has been also implicated in visual discomfort.

Putting it all together

Eyestrain is often due to a combination of factors. For example, an individual may experience blurry vision and headaches. This might be related to medications they are using or to their spectacle prescription. It could be exacerbated by working long hours with insufficient rest breaks. Their work might be visually intense yet poorly lit.

A multidisciplinary approach investigating individual, task and environmental factors may be necessary in some circumstances to solve multifaceted problems like eyestrain in the workplace. .



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