

Keeping Your Eyes Healthy at Work

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Did you know that it is not your eyes that see but your brain? It's true. The eyes act merely as a lens, receiving images but it is the brain that creates and makes sense of what the eyes are capturing. Knowing this, it is more important than ever to keep our eyes healthy and working well.

Our modern lives offer up a huge challenge when it comes to having a balanced and healthy eye/brain system. Our two eyes are meant to work as a team, flowing in between states of convergence (moving closer together) and divergence (moving further apart). When we look down or at things nearby (i.e. a computer or phone) our eyes converge. When we look up and away, our eyes diverge. In a healthy visual system, our eyes do a gentle dance between these two states all day. But when we spend most of the day looking at a computer, our eyes remain in a state of convergence. This then makes it harder for the eyes to diverge with ease when necessary. Our eyes can become stuck in the habit of convergence which can create larger vision problems in the long term.

Thus, it is more important than ever to create periods of time every day which offer a chance for your eyes and brain to rest and recover. The single easiest and more important thing you can do is simply remember to breathe and blink, blink and breathe. We have a tendency to stare while working at computers, which mean we don't blink, and our breathing can become tight and restricted. The gentle, reassuring action of blinking and breathing will allow your whole system to pause and will interrupt any patterns of held, accumulated tension.

To help further, here are three simple yet powerfully effective exercises to assist your eyes in working fluidly as an easy team. Do these regularly, particularly if, like most of us, you work at a computer all day.

1. Every time something is changing or loading on your computer, look away. Not just away, but far away. Outside the window, past the lamp post, through the trees to the sky and the clouds passing by. What do you notice about the clouds? Is there a bird out there, making an ascent? Follow that bird with your eyes. Looking up and away with regularity will keep your eyes remembering how to diverge with ease and will keep your perspective more open.
2. This simple, fun exercise comes from Brain Gym, an organization that enhances living and learning through movement: with your arm long but not tense, hold your thumb out in front of your face. Start making wide, horizontal figure eights with your thumb, and follow your thumb with your eyes but keep your head still. It is essential that only your eyes are moving, not your head. At first you might feel like your eyes are slightly sticky in their motions, that it is not comfortable to follow your thumb with ease. But keep going. Do ten repetitions with the thumb going in one direction and then in the other direction. It won't take long for your eyes to loosen up and move freely. Remember that your eyes are meant to be this free. The stuckness that you feel in the beginning is a symptom of the eyes being in a state of convergence for too long and too often.
3. Sitting or standing comfortably, locate something in the distance that is easy to see. A clock. A lamp. A picture on a wall. Make sure that what you are seeing in the distance is a still object. Then hold a pencil about eight inches away from your nose and in front of the object in the distance. Look directly at the tip of the pencil. Do you notice that the object in the distance now appears as two objects on either side of the pencil? For example, you are now seeing two clocks on the wall? Then look away to the clock, and you will now notice two pencils on either side of the clock. Move through these two states of seeing – look at the pencil tip, then look past it to the object in the distance. Allow your eyes to be soft and don't forget to blink and breathe as you do this. This is an excellent exercise to keep your eyes working as a team and remembering to converge and diverge with ease. Dr. Joseph Shapiro, an optometrist in New York City, uses this fascinating exercise with nearly all of his patients.

