

Dealing with eye strain and headaches whilst working from home during self-isolation

In these unprecedented times we are all dealing with many personal, health and financial uncertainties, often resulting in additional stress and strain as we adapt to homeworking. Dr Rashmi Singh, GP, Nuffield Health, takes a specific look at eye strain and headaches associated with the pressures we find ourselves under whilst working from home during self-isolation and lockdown.

Many of us are also now working from home on laptops for longer periods, with less time to socialise with colleagues, all while juggling work and family life; perfect ingredients for an ensuing thumping headache and tired eyes.

Headaches and migraines

Headaches are very common and can be brought on by a number of factors. Tension-type headaches typically cause pain and a band-like pressure over the head and can affect the neck and shoulder muscles too. Migraine headaches typically cause a severe throbbing pain, usually on one side. There can be aura, nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light.

Have a look at the table below which highlights the different triggers. Many of the things we end up doing when pre-occupied with working can trigger both types of headaches and are within our control to manage.

Trigger	Tension type headache	Migraine
Muscle contraction: - frowning/jaw-clenching and eye strain	✓	
Poor posture	✓	
Bright lights and loud noises	✓	✓
Stress and anxiety	✓	✓
Fatigue and poor sleep	✓	✓
Alcohol consumption	✓	✓
Certain foods and drinks: - chocolate, cheese, alcohol, caffeine and citrus	✓	✓
Dehydration	✓	✓

Computer eye strain



Typical symptoms of computer eye strain include:

- Headaches
- Sore, tired, burning or itchy eyes and dry/watery eyes
- Problems with focusing/blurry vision and light sensitivity. These symptoms usually settle after resting the eyes
- Using the computer/tablet/smartphone, reading, watching TV or playing on the games console will cause eye strain if done for too long without taking a break.

However, there are many ways we can protect ourselves during self-isolation and lockdown. Here are some simple ways to help prevent eye strain and headaches when working from home.



Top tips for preventing headaches

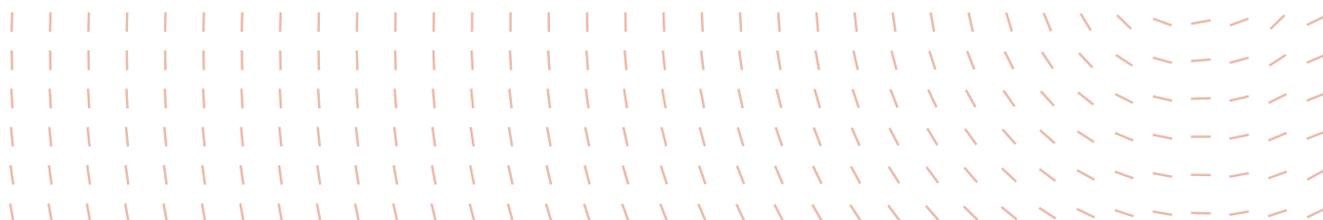


- Maintain good hydration; 2-3 litres a day is recommended for a healthy adult
- Resting enough, try to get at least 7 hours of **sleep per night**
- **Eat regular meals** with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Try to relax – dedicate some “me time” to relax and unwind – stress can make headaches worse
- Take regular exercise when possible
- Rearrange your workspace to avoid physical strain on the **back, neck and shoulders**
- To aid concentration and avoid distraction ensure your workspace is quiet and calm
- Limit your intake to no more than 4 caffeinated drinks a day.

Top tips for reducing computer eye strain



- Get a regular eye test. Tell your optician if your job involves spending a lot of time on the computer
- Ensure you are using the correct prescription of glasses (if required) for the computer work you will be doing
- Rest your eyes. Whilst sitting in front of your laptop, every 15-20 minutes look up and focus on a distant object for about a minute. This helps to relax the eye muscles
- Try to make sure your room is well lit, but not too bright. Natural light is great but ensure that strong sunlight isn't making you squint
- Reduce glare and reflections from your computer screen
- Make sure the font and image size of your screen text is adequate to read without hunching or squinting
- If possible, reduce the amount of blue light your screen is emitting by changing the display settings
- Consider lubricating/soothing eye drops to help your eyes stay comfortable.





Additional health tips for home working



- Ensure you stick to a schedule. Get dressed and freshen up even if no one is going to see you
- Eat a proper lunch and take a proper lunch break (away from your computer and phone)
- At the end of the working day, turn off your laptop and step away – separate work from home where possible by “shutting the door or laptop screen”
- Stay connected with your colleagues. Try phone or video calls to stay in touch and keep connected rather than email.

For further resources supporting employee wellbeing visit: nuffieldhealth.com/workplace-wellbeing

Dr Rashmi Singh, BSc (Hons) PhD MBBS DFSRH MRCGP (2016) is a Nuffield Health GP and health assessment doctor. She also works as a locum GP in the NHS, is a medical member on social security tribunal panels and a clinical auditor.

