

UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES • Fact Sheet

TIPS FOR SCREEN-TIME SAFETY

There is a vast amount of research about how excess screen time has negative impacts on the brain, eyes, neck and back. Smartphones pose more health risks than desktops and laptops because of their small screen size and convenience. Protect yourself from potential health issues by limiting screen time and using the following safety tips.

■ EYE HEALTH

Excessive screen time can contribute to serious eye problems like glaucoma and macular degeneration. Preserve healthy vision by using your screens, especially your smartphone, safely.

- Practice the 20/20/20 rule: Take a 20 second break every 20 minutes and look at something 20 feet away. Set a timer to remind yourself.
- Blink more to avoid dry eyes and prolonged exposure to blue light, which can be damaging to the eyes. Use artificial tears as needed for dry eyes and/or eye strain.
- Avoid using computers and smartphones in the dark. Looking at a screen in the dark increases pupil dilation and blue light exposure. Protect your eyes by turning down screen brightness in low light settings and using a blue light filter (you can download an app if your phone doesn't have a built-in filter).
- Avoid prolonged use of your smartphone. Use a desktop or laptop when possible, especially when you will be working for a long time.
- Adjust screens to 16-30" away. The top of your computer screen should be just below eye level and tilted 10-20° away. Turn your phone on its side to fill the whole screen.
- Minimize glare by keeping screens clean, repositioning, using a filter, and/or adjusting settings for contrast and brightness.
- Rest your eyes for at least 15 minutes for every 2 hours of screen time.
- Get regular eye exams, and update vision prescriptions annually.

■ NECK AND BACK CARE

- Keep your chin up. Avoid bending your neck for extended periods of time. The head tilted at 45° puts an additional 40 pounds of stress on your cervical spine and nerves!
- Do neck stretches in all directions and include scapular squeezes to release tension. Get up and move every hour.
- Be aware of posture. Keep your shoulders back and low back supported.

■ MENTAL HEALTH

- Smartphone notifications can cause hypervigilance, increased heart rates, and higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Unplug from your devices to give your brain much needed rest. Change notification settings to reduce this stress response.
- High cortisol levels can increase anxiety, as well as impair the frontal lobe and increase primitive brain activity. This can lead to decreased executive functioning and emotional regulation.
- Increased eye contact improves brain development, so look up, connect!