

This month, tech columnist Nancy Crawford takes us into the blue...



What blue light is and how might it affect your vision?

Over the past month there seems to have been a fair bit of chatter around in regards to blue light or HEV light (high-energy visible).

Blue light is a particularly intense light wave released naturally by the sun and unnaturally by some electrical devices such as smartphones, tablets and computers.

Blue light from the sun helps our body clocks know when it is time to sleep and helps keep healthy sleep patterns. It is important for colour perception, clarity and vision sharpness, among other things.

Because blue light penetrates all the way to the retina (the inner lining of the back of the eye) it is important to be careful how much blue light you are exposing yourself to each day. Too much exposure can damage light-sensitive cells in the retina. This can cause changes that are similar to those of macular degeneration, which if not caught early enough, can lead to permanent vision loss.

According to a recent study by the Vision Council of America, eye care providers are noticing a rise in people coming in with screen-related eye strain. They are complaining of irritated, dry eyes, headaches, blurred vision, neck and back pain.

At this point in time no one is sure how much natural and unnatural blue light is "too much blue light" for the retina. However, many eye care providers are concerned that the added blue light emitted from computer screens, smartphones and other digital devices might increase a person's risk of eye damage later in life.

Another sign of strain is that of disrupted sleep patterns. When devices are used late into the night, the blue light that is being omitted from your device is tricking your brain into thinking that it is day-time, and does not allow the body to start the natural process of closing down ready to sleep.

If you or your family use devices for more than two hours at a time you may have already notice the early signs of digital eye strain.

Simple ways to take care of your eyes when using digital devices:

- Where possible limit the amount of time you spend on a device each day – especially for children, as their eyes are still growing and developing until around the age of seven years.
- Keep the distance between you and the device to at least 40-60cm.
- Increase the size of the font where possible and be aware of the brightness of the screen adjusting regularly until you notice your eyes relax.
- Do not use devices two hours before bedtime.
- Where possible wear protective blue light filtering glasses to significantly reduce the effects of blue light.

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