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Healthy Vision on the Job is Everyone's Business

In honor of March's Save Your Vision Month, the AOA encourages Americans to prevent workplace eye strain and eye injuries by following some easy and important steps

ST. LOUIS, MO, Feb. 25, 2010 — Whether using a computer or a sledge hammer to get the job done, the American Optometric Association (AOA) reports that visual discomfort, eye strain and eye injuries in the workplace are not only common, but cost billions in lost productivity each year. And, research indicates that 2,000 workers each day in the United States sustain job-related eye injuries requiring medical treatment, yet safety experts and doctors of optometry agree that 90 percent of all eye and vision injuries could be prevented with simple safety steps such as wearing properly designed and fitted protective eyewear.

"Healthy vision is critical to successfully completing job-related tasks," said James Sheedy, O.D. Ph.D., Director of the Vision Ergonomics Laboratory at the College of Optometry at Pacific University and AOA's occupational vision specialist. "And while most people think of construction or manufacturing as high-risk occupations where eye injuries are prevalent, even jobs requiring "smart phones," laptops and desktop computers can cause vision problems if not used properly."

Go Easy on the PDA

According to the AOA's American Eye-Q® survey, nearly half of all Americans (46 percent) spend five or more hours per day using a computer or a PDA (personal digital assistant). And while technology can easily improve the efficiencies of one's life, prolonged use of electronic devices may lead to symptoms of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) such as eye strain, dry eyes, headaches, fatigue, blurred vision and loss of focus.

"CVS can be a serious problem for those who spend hours in front of a computer or hand-held electronic device on a daily basis," said Dr. Sheedy. "However, in this digital era, no one expects Americans to simply stop using these devices. Small steps can make big changes to ease vision strain."

The AOA encourages all tech users to follow the below recommendations, which will go a long way in keeping productivity up and discomfort down while surfing the Web, editing a document or sending an e-mail.

- **Give It A Rest:** Remember the 20-20-20 rule. At least every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and look at something 20 feet away. The Eye-Q® survey found that the majority of Americans don't follow this rule; more than half (59 percent) take breaks every hour, or less frequently.
- **Size Up:** Smaller screens on hand-held devices usually favor tiny type that challenges your vision. Instead of bringing the screen closer to the eyes, increase the font size so the device can be used at a distance that is more comfortable for your eyes.



- **Sharpen Up:** Better resolution offers greater clarity and usually more comfort. Adjust the brightness of the screen to a comfortable intensity, neither too bright nor too dim.
- **Reduce Glare:** Hand-held devices present challenges in various lighting conditions. When possible, try to make sure lighting is not directly behind the head or in front. The AOA recommends users try to reduce glare, which may ease reading and can make a bigger difference than increasing the font.
- **Look Down:** It's easier on the eyes to focus on reading material that is below eye level, therefore, the AOA recommends a computer monitor or hand-held device be positioned slightly below eye level.

Safer Sight On-Site

Many professions – from auto repair to health care – require protective eyewear to help reduce the risk of eye injuries. The AOA advises that with proper eye protection, like safety glasses, goggles, face shields and helmets, thousands of injuries could be prevented. Yet the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in approximately 60 percent of eye injury cases, workers failed to wear proper protective eyewear.

While working around the house, it seems an even greater percentage fail to protect their sight. The Eye-Q® survey found that nearly two-thirds of Americans do not wear safety glasses or goggles when working on home improvement projects.

“Eye safety – whether at home or in the work place – is proven to prevent vision loss,” said Dr. Sheedy. “The two main reasons workers experience eye injuries are either because they are not wearing eye protection or they are wearing the wrong kind of protection for the job.”

The AOA recommends four key elements to protect eyes from injury:

- Know the eye safety dangers.
- Eliminate hazards before starting work such as using machine guards, work screens or other engineering controls.
- Wear the proper eye protection and make sure it is correctly fitted.
- Keep safety eyewear in good condition and replace it if it is damaged.

Visit Your Optometrist

While it's important to practice good eye health habits at work, the best line of defense is to visit a doctor of optometry on a regular basis for comprehensive eye exams to help ensure healthy vision.

The AOA recommends adults age 60 and under have a comprehensive eye exam every two years and then annually thereafter. Based on an individual's eye health, the eye doctor may recommend more frequent visits.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on eye safety in the workplace, please visit www.AOA.org.



About the survey:

The fourth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 21 – 24, 2009, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

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