- Eye / Screen time



Eye Dos

Nature can also help our eyes by providing foods rich in nutrients that improve eye health. This means eating plenty of antioxidants, especially foods high in vitamins A, C and E.

GREEN screen

The solution to eye strain and screen fatigue is as simple as stepping outside.

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If your work requires you to stay in front of a screen for many hours a day, you've probably experienced eye strain. Whether you're peering at a computer screen or smartphone, our 'near work' means our eyes get so used to accommodating close-distance tasks that when you look elsewhere, it takes your eyes a moment or two to adjust. Holding visual focus enhances mental focus, but it is tiring and is different from how our eyes were designed to operate all day long.

THE IMPACT ON BLINKING

Prolonged screen time means we blink less. Usually, you'll blink around 17 times a minute. Focusing on screens can cause that to drop to five to seven times, and that blinking is less complete. This leads to dry eyes, an issue compounded by exposure to air conditioning or heating. How much time do you spend in front of a screen each day? The average worldwide is seven hours a day. Yet, we typically only spend 30 minutes outside.

Once more, nature provides simple solutions. You can improve your visual range simply by getting outside for a few minutes, preferably longer, to stretch your extraocular muscles. Distance vision lowers stress, which feels good, right? You may notice you're more relaxed and less tense. Stress causes your pupils to constrict as part of the fight, flight or freeze response. Lower stress allows your pupillary muscles to relax. Making your visual stretch routine a regular habit makes it easier for you to focus when required.

IT'S ABOUT FOCUS

Depending on how you work, aim to chunk your focused work into blocks of up to 90 minutes (or whatever is practical for you) and then take a nature break for 15 to 20 minutes. This follows the ultradian rhythm, your naturally occurring body-clock-regulating energy. Taking a nature break restores your cognition and attention ready for the next chunk of focused work.

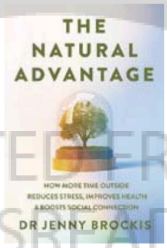
Get out in natural light to allow your eyes to relax while you enjoy a visual feast of colours, light and shade. Looking at greenery provides greater soft fascination – your brain enters the default mode, which requires far less effort and helps you relax. Natural green vegetation also helps filter out harmful UV rays and reduces glare. It makes you more creative and puts you in a better mood. Bonus! When out and about, I often find myself drawn to looking up at the trees around me, watching the branches sway in the wind, listening to the rustling leaves and scouting for the birds I can hear twittering.

EXPLORE THE GREENERY

Looking at a treescape has been shown to reduce stress, and the greater the tree density, the more beneficial the effect. Blue and green, the predominant colours in nature, have been found to improve emotional wellbeing and lower psychological stress. These colours have lower wavelengths, meaning your eyes don't need to adjust. They are calming and promote relaxation. Don't forget your hat and sunglasses for adequate UV protection when outdoors. The best ones wrap around your eyes to protect your peripheral vision.

If you can't get away, something simple you can do is to follow the 20-20-20 rule: look away from your screen every 20 minutes and focus on something that is 20 feet away (6 metres) for at least 20 seconds. The joy of having windows is that these provide the perfect way to achieve this, with the bonus that having a green outlook is particularly soothing for your eyes and brain. This also reduces dry eye issues as your blinking rate increases. When you return to your screen, keep it at arm's length and with the font size easy to read to reduce eyestrain.

Edited extract from *The Natural Advantage* (Major Street $32.99) by Dr Jenny Brockis, a board-certified lifestyle medicine physician, workplace health and wellbeing consultant. Visit drjennybrockis.com



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