

Soaring Screen Time

Pandemic Amplifies Vision Issues, Creating Opportunities for ECPs



BY JULIE BOS / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Long before COVID-19 turned our world upside-down, concerns over too much screen time and the rise of Digital Eye Strain (DES) were already escalating. But it's safe to say the COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating the situation for people everywhere, and especially for children who have multiplied their time on-screen—using digital devices for both virtual education and recreational down-time.

While more time at home has been good

for slowing the spread of COVID-19, it's forcing many people's eyes to suffer. Our new reliance on digital devices for work, school and entertainment is more all-encompassing than ever.

Majority of Americans Suffering from Screen Fatigue

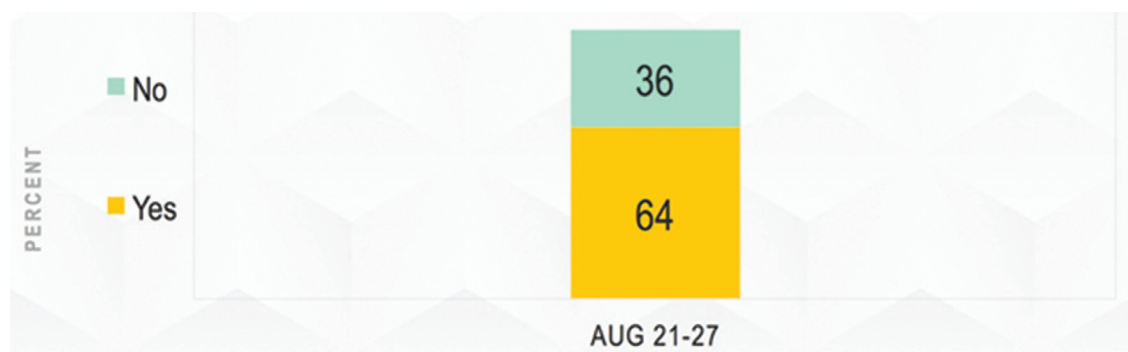
A new survey of 2,000 Americans found 53% of respondents are feeling burnt out on screens over the last few months.

The survey, conducted by OnePoll on behalf of Foster Grant, found nearly six in 10 respon-

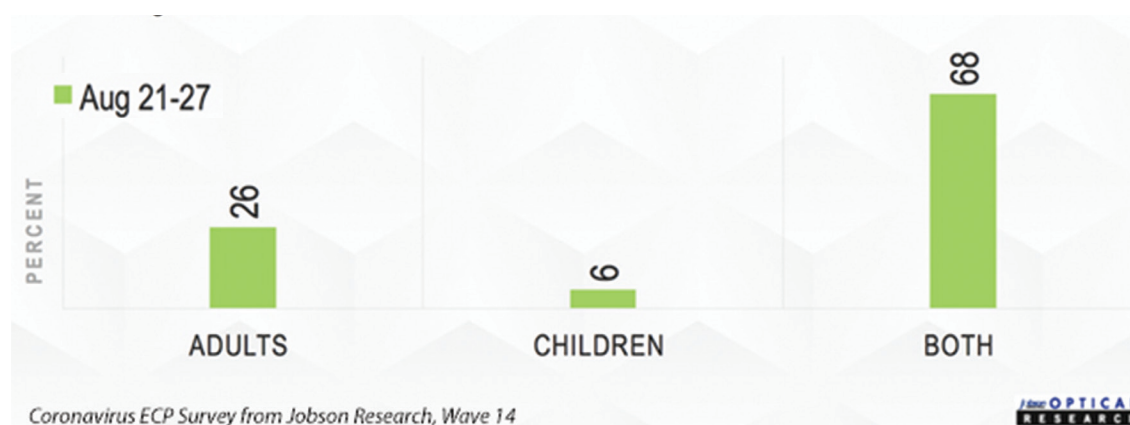
dents said they often get screen-related aches and pains, with the average respondent getting about three per week. According to the results, 57% of Americans say the pandemic has caused them to suffer from more "screenaches" than ever before.

The study also showed that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the average American surveyed was getting about four hours of screen time per day. Since the quarantine started, that number has jumped up to over six hours—and their eyes are paying the price.

Have you noticed more patients having issues due to increased screen time?

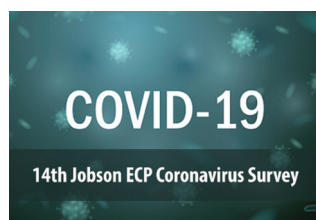


If notice more patients having issues due to increased screentime: Have you seen this more with adults or children?



Survey Says: 64% of ECPs Notice Issues from Increased Screen Time

In Jobson's recent Coronavirus survey, 64% of eyecare professional (ECP) respondents noticed more patients having issues due to increased screen time; and 68% of those said the issues affected both adults and children.



Even Before COVID: 71% of Parents Were Concerned About Screen Time

Even before the coronavirus, research from the Pew Research Center illuminated parents' concern about the effects of too much screen time for their children.

Altogether, 71% of parents of a child under the age of 12 stated that they were at least somewhat concerned their child might spend too much time in front of screens, including 31% who were very concerned about this.

It's important to note that this survey was

fielded before the COVID-19 outbreak closed many schools and led to widespread shut-downs and stay-at-home orders throughout the country. Today's numbers are likely much higher.

Why Screen Time Is Reaching Record Highs

For years, excessive screen time has been a growing problem that takes a toll on adults of all ages, including young adults, mobile users,

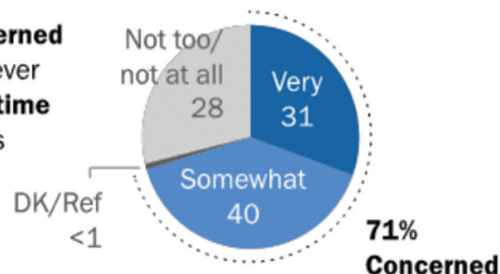
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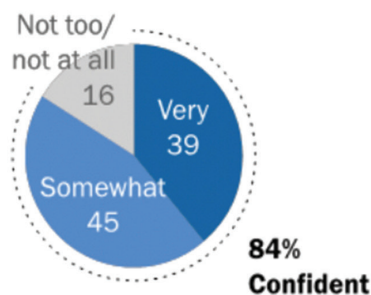
A majority of parents are concerned that their child might ever spend too much time on screens and have reached out to doctors for advice about this.

% of U.S. parents of a child age 11 or younger who say ...

They are **concerned** their child might ever **spend too much time** in front of screens



They are **confident** in their ability to **know how much screen time is appropriate** for their child



*Based on parents of a child age 5 to 11.

**Based on internet users.

***Based on social media users.

Note: If parent has multiple children, they were asked to focus on one child when answering this question. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 2-15, 2020.

"Parenting Children in the Age of Screens"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/parenting-children-in-the-age-of-screens/>

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office workers, tech developers, 40-50-some-things and aging 60-70-year-olds, too.

Today, we're faced with a new reality where most of what we do, and what our children do, involves some kind of screen time. That means soaring screen time now affects everyone—no age group is immune, and children with developing eyes are especially at risk.

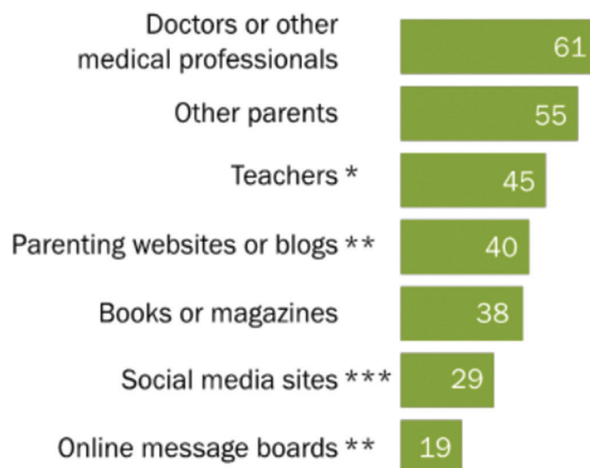
The reality is, humans have never spent this much time with screens in history and there are several reasons for this.

Working from Home Extends the Workday

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is working in new ways—many of which are reliant on digital screens. With more people working from home, face-to-face meetings in the office have been replaced by virtual meetings on a desktop PC, laptop, tablet or smartphone using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype and other online collaboration tools.

Informal work hours and lack of commute time means lunch breaks are now spent over

They ever get **parenting advice or information** about screen time from ...



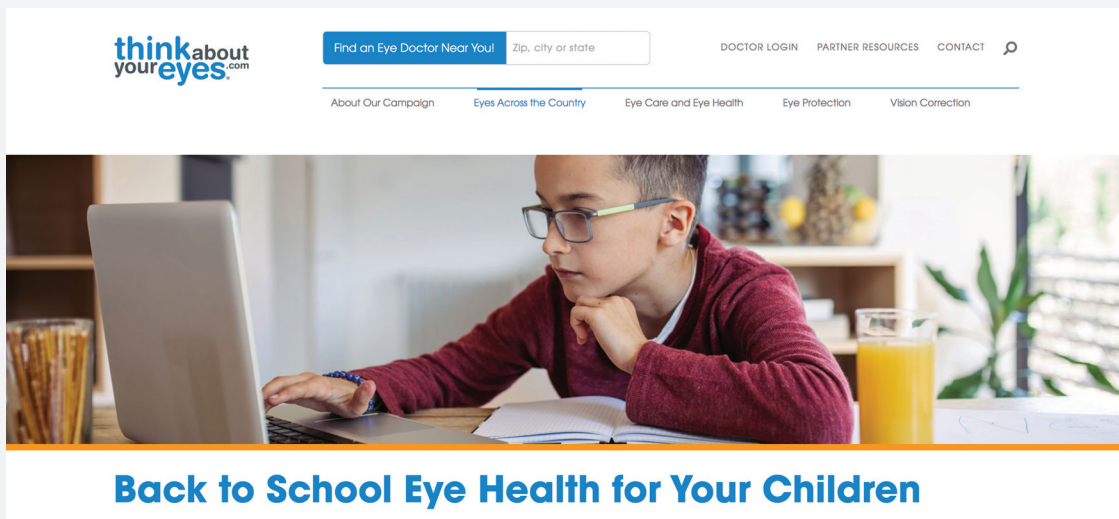
the laptop, and it's harder to end the workday at a reasonable hour. People are checking work email early in the morning and late into the evening—with real-time notifications keeping people connected long after they should have "turned off" for the day. Without distractions like coffee breaks and conversations with colleagues, it's never been easier to spend 11 hours a day on screen. No commuting in the evening also gives people even more time to binge-watch video content on their TVs or tablets.

Back-to-School: The Perfect Time to Promote Eye Exams

Many schools across the U.S. are now back in session—with virtual learning the predominant method. The dramatic surge in screen time calls for increased vision protection, especially for children whose eyes are still developing and may be exposed to higher levels of harmful blue light.

According to Think About Your Eyes, 24 percent of parents wait for their children to display the symptoms of a vision problem before taking them to an eyecare provider. This can be problematic, in part, because many kids don't understand what "normal" vision really means.

Worse yet, many kids don't have comprehensive vision exams, yet it's a major factor in their learning cures. As the 2020/21 school year begins, prioritizing eye exams for kids is taking on new urgency. ECPs should encourage all patients with children to make eye exam appointments. ■




Remote Education Keeps Children Connected Longer

With an estimated 55 million U.S. elementary and secondary students completing the 2020-21 academic year online, the number of hours spent in front of digital devices has increased to a staggering number. School hours that used to be spent in real classrooms, in libraries and on the playground are now spent in front of a PC or laptop, which means children of all ages are on screen like never before. And parents who normally limit screen time for

younger children can't pull the plug on virtual education—it's a necessity—so their hands are somewhat tied.

Social Distancing Increases Recreational Screen Time

With COVID-19 still a real concern, many states continue to encourage social distancing. This means no large gatherings, no going out to eat, and a whole lot more staying inside at home. So what are families and children doing in their leisure time? A lot of it is digital entertainment—

gaming, movies and binge-watching TV—which means there's no break in the screen time.

Recent statistics convey the extent of the growth.

Streaming giant Netflix has seen record-setting viewer growth since the onset of COVID-19—adding an unprecedented 25.86 million subscribers in the first six months of 2020, nearly as many as it added in all of 2019. People are consuming, not just Netflix, but all kinds of home-based video content at extraordinary levels.

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For patients at Bella Eye Care Optometry (Newark, California), this year will be one of distance learning, at least in the beginning. To do their part, the team is encouraging parents to keep their kids' eyes healthy and learn about blue light in addition to the annual exam. Image via bellaeyecareoptometry on Instagram.

bellaeyecareoptometry
Bella Eye Care Optometry

bellaeyecareoptometry see better - learn better. state going to distance l the first few months, it's keep our children's eyes l all of the screen time and studying. Make sure they glasses they need, and y'a doctors about blue light b glasses as an option too. #bellaeyecareoptometry #gameovermyopia #blue



norwalk.eyecare • Following

norwalk.eyecare It may look a little different this year, but vision is crucial to learning both virtually and in the classroom.

Long hours on computers/tablets and overexposure to high-energy blue light and glare may be disrupting healthy sleep patterns and putting stress on the visual system, making it difficult for your child's eyes to properly maintain focus. Schedule a visit for your child to ensure they are not held back this year by Digital Eye Strain.

A comprehensive eye exam can make all the difference in your child's academic performance!

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By Oran, age 5

0:00 / 1:46

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The quickest and easiest way to get in touch with us if you have a problem with your eyes or glasses is via our website www.jbeyecare.com Virtual appts for eye problems Appt requests for spec problems Ordering service for contact lenses/solutions

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74 views

JULY 23

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The team at Norwalk Eye Care (Norwalk, Connecticut) is also gearing up to prepare kids, parents and teachers for a virtual year, and put together an educational post about why a comprehensive eye exam is still so important when school is online. Image via [norwalk.eyecare](https://www.instagram.com/norwalk.eyecare) on Instagram.

Jack Brown Eyecare (Edinburgh, Scotland) put together a little tutorial for kids to demonstrate how to wear a mask and glasses together. Image via [jbeyecare](https://www.instagram.com/jbeyecare) on Instagram.

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Since the pandemic, online gaming has also surged. Digital game distributors, such as Steam, reported a considerable increase in the number of daily users in the spring—reaching a record high in April.

Between work, school, TV content, movies, online gaming and social media, people could conceivably be online (in one form or another) nearly all day.

The Prevalence of Digital Eye Strain

Even pre-COVID, Digital Eye Strain (DES) was a growing issue. According to 2018 research from The Vision Council, about 80 percent of

American adults reported using digital devices for more than two hours per day with nearly 67 percent using two or more devices simultaneously, and 59 percent reported experiencing symptoms of digital eye strain.

At the time of the survey (before the pandemic), Americans reported experiencing the following symptoms of digital eye strain:

- 32.4 percent report experiencing eye strain
- 27.2 percent report experiencing dry eyes
- 27.7 percent report experiencing headaches
- 27.9 percent report experiencing blurred vision
- 35 percent report experiencing neck and shoulder pain

Additionally, close to 80 percent reported using digital devices, including TV, in the hour before going to sleep, with almost 55 percent in the first hour they are awake.

Considering the enormous ramifications of the COVID-19 quarantine “lockdown” and subsequent remote working/learning scenarios, the actual numbers have likely changed—and probably not for the better.

Contributing to the Problem: Blue Light

It's well known that blue light exposure from LED lights, televisions, computer monitors, smartphones and tablet screens is small compared

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Increased Screen Time for Kids: Prompting New Discussions on Myopia Management

Myopia has been growing at a rapid rate in children, and it significantly increases a child's risk for more serious eye diseases—even blindness—in adulthood. Myopia prevalence in the 5- to 19-years-old age group of American children is 42 percent, according to recent research.

Yet because so few parents are familiar with myopia, it goes untreated in staggering numbers, creating barriers for children.

If there's any bright spot to the rise in kids' screen time from virtual learning and online gaming, it may be that it's prompting new awareness of myopia—and also new ways to manage it.

Myopia management is a long-term treatment program to keep the level of myopia as low as possible, and to reduce children's risk of developing eye disease. It can involve the use of eyeglasses, contact lenses and eye drops—all scientifically proven to aid in the control of myopia progression. Myopia management has shown to decrease myopia progression by up to 78 percent.

The widespread push for myopia management is visible on many fronts.

Just last month (August 2020), CooperVision announced that popular U.S. television actress and producer Sarah Michelle Gellar is the spokeswoman for its Brilliant Futures Myopia Management Program. This new, multichannel direct-to-consumer advertising campaign featuring Gellar will highlight the importance of annual comprehensive eye exams in monitoring the progression of myopia in children. It will be one of the largest consumer myopia management campaigns in the U.S. with a \$33 million advertising value.

In addition, Jobson joined the Global Myo-

Review of Myopia Management is a leading source of clinical, practice management, market and research info on myopia for ECPs.



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opia Awareness Coalition (GMAC) last year as the official North American media sponsor for the group, which seeks to raise public awareness of childhood myopia, one of the major public health issues of our time.

Want to learn more about myopia? Go to Review of Myopia Management at <https://reviewofmm.com/>, a leading source of clinical, practice management, market and research info on myopia for ECPs. ■

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Dr. Nathan Bonilla-Warford from Bright Eyes Kids (Tampa, Florida) created a free guide for visual health for students (and parents) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Image via BEKidsVision on Facebook.



Another doctor from Bright Eyes Kids, Dr. Elizabeth Knighton, created a short video with tips for managing screen time. Image via Bright Eyes Family Vision Care on YouTube.



Many ECPs also promote the "20-20-20" rule from the American Optometric Association: Every 20 minutes look 20 feet away for 20 seconds to relax the eyes.

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to the amount of exposure people get from the sun. However, there's plenty of concern over the long-term effects of screen exposure, due to the close proximity of the screens and the length of time most people spend looking at them.

Short-term effects of blue light from digital devices are common and include eyestrain and eye fatigue, dry eyes, blurry vision, neck and shoulder pain, and even increased frequency of headaches. Blue light may also affect sleep quality.

Fortunately, eyewear is available with lenses featuring anti-reflective and blue light-filtering

capabilities, as well as select contact lenses, to help reduce the symptoms of digital eye strain.

How ECPs Are Addressing the Need

1. They're getting social.

Many ECPs are boosting awareness of digital eye strain and blue light, promoting eye exams and helping to educate patients through social media campaigns.

2. They're promoting behavior change.

ECPs are also offering free resources to educate parents, including how to set up virtual learning spaces at home, and how to make rules to manage screen time.

3. They're prescribing smart solutions.

With the rise in screen time, increased exposure to harmful blue light and growing prevalence of digital eye strain, the industry offers an ever-growing number of vision solutions to help. ECPs are doing their part by having focused conversations and accessing an expanded offering to protect patients' vision, including:

- Glasses, frames and contacts
- Blue light blocking solutions
- Supplements and vitamins

See sidebar on page 43 for specific products. ■

Products That Can Help Patients Make Their Screen Time Healthier and More Comfortable

Health and wellness is one of the biggest consumer trends today. The enormous popularity of websites such as *WebMD*, VM's parent company, shows that consumers are hungry for information that can help them pursue healthier lifestyles and make better product choices.

Eyewear is a natural fit with health and wellness, since its essential function is to help us see better and protect our eyes. One of the best ways for eyecare professionals to discuss health and wellness with patients is to talk with them about spectacle lenses that can enhance their vision and preserve sight when they are viewing screens on digital devices.

The range of eyewear and lens products that alleviate digital eye strain, including the effects of blue light, is broad and continuing to grow. Here are just a few examples of products released in the past year or two that can help patients make their screen time healthier and more comfortable. ■



Hilco Vision Adds New Leader Blu-Ban Style

Quick Take: Hilco Vision is introducing Angelica, a new style from its Leader Blu-Ban collection.

Specifics: Angelica offers a variety of shapes and colors, features AR coating and reflects 85 percent of blue light. It is available in rose, teal, pink and Havana.

Selling Point: Sold individually or in a 40-piece assortment, including 4 frame colors per style ranging in powers from plano to +2.50, Angelica is a cost-effective blue light protection solution.

bit.ly/hilcovision



Zeiss Debuts SmartLife, a New Lens Design Technology

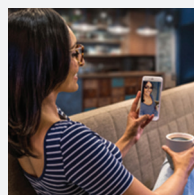
Product: Zeiss SmartLife Lens Portfolio

Top Line: SmartLife lenses from Carl Zeiss Vision feature a new lens design concept that addresses the evolving visual needs and challenges posed by today's digital,

busy lifestyle.

Close Up: Over the past 10 years, the shift toward using technology while on-the-go has profoundly changed the way we use our eyes and resulted in a growing number of eyeglass wearers reporting symptoms such as eye strain, tired eyes, and head and neck aches.

bit.ly/zeissmartlife



VSP Optics Launches New SV Lens for Digital Eye Strain Relief

Product: Unity Relieve

Top Line: VSP Optics has launched Unity Relieve, a new single-vision lens designed to combat digital eye strain.

Close Up: Unity Relieve provides visual comfort for single-vision patients who use digital devices for two or more hours a day. The unique design offers unrestricted distance vision and a slight power boost in the bottom of the lens to help alleviate symptoms like dry eyes, headaches, blurred vision, etc., often caused by viewing screens, tablets, and smart phones. Unity Relieve lenses are automatically paired with TechShield Blue, a next-generation anti-reflective coating that reduces blue light exposure.

bit.ly/vspunityrelieve



ClearVision Shows BluTech Kids' Frames

Quick Take: ClearVision is sharing two children's blue light blocking styles from BluTech.

Specifics: The two styles are

On The Edge and Anne Droid. Both rectangular frames are available in two colors and feature details such as patterned fronts, color contrasting temple tips and corner details.

Selling Point: BluTech's kids' styles are fun and trendy while protecting eye health.

bit.ly/clearvisionblutech



Signet Armorlite Intros Kodak PowerUp Lens

Product: Kodak PowerUp Lens

Top Line: Signet Armorlite is expanding its Kodak Lens portfolio with an enhanced single vision, Kodak PowerUp Lens.

Close Up: With the increasing use of digital devices, eyeglass wearers of all ages need vision support for prolonged, comfortable reading up close. Kodak PowerUp Lenses offer two levels of power boost in the reading area: 0.40D and 0.66D, for adults that are not ready for a progressive lens design.

bit.ly/kodakpoweruplens



Transitions Optical Launches Transitions Signature GEN 8

Product: Transitions Signature GEN 8

Top Line: Transitions Optical is launching the next generation

of Transitions Signature lenses—Transitions Signature GEN 8. Transitions Signature GEN 8 lenses are engineered with new proprietary technology that delivers the best overall photochromic lens performance, the brand said in a statement.

Close Up: The next generation of Transitions Signature lenses comes six years after the launch of Transitions Signature VII lenses with a new, breakthrough technology.

bit.ly/transitionsignaturegen8



To read more about digital eye strain, go to VM's Issue Archives (www.visionmonday.com/digital-editions/) to access our Special Report titled *Screen Time: Digital Eye Strain Abounds, But Awareness Lags Despite Screen Options*.