

## EYE HEALTH AND THE PANDEMIC – ANOTHER UNHAPPY MARRIAGE

**LARGELY** as the result of the confinement imposed by the current pandemic, our daily habits have been altered. Spending more time than usual in front of computer screens and mobile phones, remaining at home or reducing the number of check-up appointments have worsened eye health to the point that irreparable vision loss may have resulted in patients with previous or undetected pathologies. These are the conclusions of a report published by Spanish and Portuguese researchers.

According to these experts, during the current pandemic, there has been a reduction in the number of routine appointments and, at the same time, an increase in the time spent in front of computer screens. This combination has affected eye health.

Using near vision and intermediate distance vision constantly has thus intensified. This has aggravated eye diseases, such as dry eye, asthenopia (visual fatigue, weakness or eye strain), red eyes and also myopia (especially in young people).

According to the researchers, dry eye is the most prevalent disorder linked to the pandemic, associated not only with the constant use of screens but also attributed to the use of masks, as both reduce blinking, which works as a lubricant and even a cleaning agent.

Another important aspect resulting from the pandemic is that, globally, eye health has worsened due to the postponement of consultations and tests and, consequently, the delay in obtaining a timely diagnosis of important pathologies, such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy or glaucoma. These diseases can cause irreparable loss of vision.

For example, AMD leads to a marked decrease in central vision or even blindness, which begins at around age 55 to 60. This disease does not present significant symptoms in its early stages.

Also due to the pandemic, many cataract



where, for example, every 20 minutes you rest your eyes for a certain period by looking away from the screen at a spot in the far distance;

- Try to use less near and intermediate vision. For example, if you are going to use a screen, it is better to opt for television rather than your mobile phone for the same purpose;
- During periods of leisure, always prefer to spend more time outdoors;
- Avoid having light reflection on screens. This can cause eye strain;
- Blink often: this helps to moisture the ocular surface, and contains many essential nutrients;
- Undergo eye exams routinely, annually, at critical ages (at an early age, during pregnancy or over the age of 40);
- If you suffer from a pathology already detected, do not neglect treatment or interventions. Despite not having many symptoms, irreparable vision loss often occurs.

Article submitted by the HPA Health Group.

interventions have been postponed, a situation that has jeopardised quality of life of patients, causing poor visual quality, an increased risk of traffic accidents, falls, fractures and even worsening neurological or psychological problems.

Experts have warned that it is urgent to resume routine appointments and eye exams

with the ophthalmologist. All hospitals and clinics have adopted hygiene and sanitary measures, following strict safety standards.

However, it is also important that each individual takes responsibility for his/her eye health by following the advice below:

- Look for open air and properly-lit spaces; natural

light and in particular the sun are always more beneficial than artificial light;

- Work in properly humidified environments; heating or air conditioning dries out the environment and also the eyes. Humidifiers can be a good alternative to avoid dry eye;
- Take visual breaks; programme a work routine



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