BEH PODCAST – EPISODE 10

COMPUTER SCREENS AND EYE STRAIN

Participant: My question is regarding computer screens. I use computer screens all day and wear yellow-lensed glasses that are meant to shield from the blue ray. I just wonder if you have any other recommendations or things to take note of in terms of looking at computer screens.

Dr. Miller: Well I'm assuming, in this day in age, that the screen you're using is not a big, cathode ray tube, it's a flat screen?

Participant: Yes.

Dr. Miller: You know the electron beam that would get shot up the screen in the big, older, clunky, heavy monitors that have the cathode ray tubes? There's a lot of radiation off those; there's not nearly as much or none really off the flat screens.

There is an electromagnetic field, often from the computer itself, that's running that screen. You should check and make sure that the computer is properly grounded and if possible that it's as far away from where you're sitting, so you're not sitting on the power supply in the computer itself. The yellow-lensed glasses can definitely help reduce the strain.

There are two things that they've studied with computer screens that effect vision, but they are not directly because of the screen. The first thing to keep in mind is making sure the screen is positioned so that you're looking straight at it, you don't have to look up or look down. Looking up or down stresses your neck and that effects blood flow to your brain and your eye. So you want to make sure that the ergonomics—chair, keyboard, mouse, screen, really everything—is at a very comfortable place, where you can just sit in a relaxed position with your neck neutral, right in front of you is the screen, and you don't have to look up or look down.

The other thing is not directly related to the screen, but can easily be a problem is if you're working on a computer and look to suddenly see that an hour has gone by. And you've been sitting there typing, clicking around, looking at the screen for an hour without any interruption. You can buy a little cheap timer and set it so that every 25 minutes or so, it goes off. At the very least, you want to get up out of your chair, spin around a few times, and walk away and walk back. It doesn't take a lot, but just doing something to break up that cycle of just sitting there has a very positive effect. It is a lot of work to stare at something that's that close and it is a stress.

The best treatment found for repetitive stress injuries of any sort, whether its visual,

carpal tunnel, or other similar issues is what I was just talking about, meaning to take a little bit of a break every 20 or 25 minutes. I say little because there have been studies that have shown if you do nothing more than just standing up, walking two or three feet away from your chair and then going back to work that has huge benefits. I would do those simple things first, and if you still feel like you're having stress from the screen, then we can go back to the question again, and we'll see if there's more you can do.

Participant: Thank you.