

MEDIA RELEASE

Looking each other in the eye can save your relationship and your eyes

September 7, Melbourne: Optometry Australia, the peak professional body for optometrists, has applauded SBS's riveting series [Look Me in the Eye](#), which premiered last night.

Optometrists are hoping the series, in which estranged loved ones are made to look into each other's eyes for five minutes, will encourage Australians to put down their screens and reconnect – for the sake of their relationships *and* their eye health.

No stranger to looking people in the eye is Optometry Australia's resident optometrist Luke Arundel, who said members were finding increasing numbers of patients presenting with digital eye strain due to overuse of digital devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Mr Arundel said, "Symptoms of digital eye strain, such as dry, irritated eyes, blurred vision, neck and back pain and headaches, are increasingly reducing our quality of life. It's not a problem we should simply be getting used to," he said.

The optometrist's observations were reflected in a recent US report by The Vision Council, *Eyes Overexposed: Digital Device Dilemma*, which found digital eye strain was the new normal, particularly among younger generations.

Nearly nine out of 10 millennials (87 per cent) in their twenties used two or more devices simultaneously and 73 percent reported symptoms of digital eye strain.

Sixty-six per cent of people in their forties experienced digital eye strain, which was exacerbated by needing to focus on multiple devices at various distances to counteract presbyopia -- the normal loss of near-focusing which is first noticed by this age group.

"Proximity of the screen, the frequency and duration of use and levels of blue light exposure are all factors you should be discussing with your optometrist," Mr Arundel said.

"For most of us, our eyes prefer to focus further than six metres away, so viewing a computer screen forces the muscles in our eyes to work harder. Often the type we are viewing on a digital device can be small or unclear, and glare is emitted off the screen. Also, while it's normal for us to blink about 15 times a minute, studies have shown that we blink far less often while using digital devices leading to dry eye symptoms.

"We can no longer afford to look away from the country's digital eye strain epidemic. It may be the new norm, but it shouldn't be. If a TV show prompts us to appreciate our eyes, to look away from our phones, and reconnect with our loved ones face to face, then that's a win for eye health," Mr Arundel said.

Screen time ruins your relationships

A US [study](#)ⁱ found three quarters of women in long-term relationships felt smartphones interfered with their relationship. Sixty-two per cent of women who were surveyed also said technology interfered with their free time together.

On the other hand, a UK [study](#)ⁱⁱ, in which subjects who engaged in mutual gaze with a stranger for two minutes reported significantly increased feelings of passionate love.

Optometry Australia's message to an addicted country

According to the Digital Australia: State of the Nation 2015–16 report, 31 per cent of Australians say they are 'addicted' to their smartphone or tablet.

A 2016 Ernst & Young digital study reported Australians who own a connected digital device spend on average 10 hours a day in front of digital screens.

In a bid to reduce the prevalence of digital eye strain, Optometry Australia recently launched a consumer awareness [video](#), to drive home the message: give your eyes a break.

Optometry Australia advises taking regular breaks using the 20/20/20 rule: every 20 minutes, shift your eyes to look at an object at least 20 feet away (six metres), for at least 20 seconds.

See your optometrist

Backed by neuroscience, SBS's *Look Me In The Eye* series proves eyes are indeed windows to the soul, communicating so much more than words.

Aren't your eyes, and your relationships, worth saving?

Common conditions such as myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism or presbyopia can exacerbate eye strain so ensure you have regular eye examinations with your optometrist to maintain good vision, for life. Your optometrist can discuss with you the lifestyle factors and screen habits which may be contributing to digital eye strain.

Find an optometrist in your local area at goodvisionforlife.com.au.

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Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing eight out of every 10 Australian-based optometrists, Optometry Australia's focus is to lead and advance the profession of optometry by putting eye-health front and centre of Australian health care.

ⁱ McDaniel, B. T., & Coyne, S. M. (2016). "Technoference": The interference of technology in couple relationships and implications for women's personal and relational well-being. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 5(1), 85-98.

ⁱⁱ Kellerman, Joan & Lewis, James & Laird, James. (1989). Looking and loving: The effects of mutual gaze on feelings of romantic love. *Journal of Research in Personality*. 23. 145-161. 10.1016/0092-6566(89)90020-2.