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BEHAVIOURAL OPTOMETRY  
CHILDREN'S VISION**

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Optometric Vision Therapy  
**'VISUAL HYGIENE' FOR CHILDREN (& ADULTS!)**

**Good visual habits** are important from an early age to minimise visual and eye stress and reduce the chance of adverse visual adaptations.

Parents please read the following 'Visual Hygiene' points carefully and encourage your children to conform:

**1. Take regular rest breaks with prolonged close work – remember our eyes have to work harder the closer we look at things.** When reading, studying, using computers and ipads, and especially when playing electronic hand-held games, take regular focus-shift rest breaks at least every 15 minutes, for about 15 seconds. Placing a bookmark 10 or so pages in front of where you are reading may help you get into the habit of doing this when reading. When you get to the bookmark, it will remind you to look up at something in the distance. Make sure it is clear, then relax and close your eyes for a few seconds. When you look back down to your work move the bookmark another 10 pages in front. Make sure you have a break at the end of every chapter.

**2. Make sure you do not get too close to your near work. Observe "The Elbow Rule"** - you should not be any closer than the distance between your knuckle to elbow when the knuckle is placed against your chin. Again use the bookmark to remind you to check this periodically when reading - you may not be aware of the fact that you are getting closer to your work as you tire. Be particularly careful not to hold electronic hand-held devices too close!

**3. Ensure good lighting for all visually demanding activities.** General room lighting should allow distance objects to be seen easily when looking up. Be careful with positioning of lights to ensure no shadows or glare.  
*Do not read after the lights have turned out or with a torch!*

**4. Ensure good posture** for all near tasks, keeping head straight and book centred in line with nose (so as the focus demand on the two eyes is equal).  
Avoid lying down in bed to read (especially on the tummy) or on the floor. **Sit up to read.**

**5. Do not sit any closer to the TV** than 2 x the child's body lengths. Young children like to sit very close to the TV because they want to be 'involved'. Room lighting should be adequate. Passive TV viewing times should be limited as vision develops better with active tasks such as sport and reading.

**6. Off-set highly visually demanding indoor near tasks with outdoor games requiring clear long distance viewing** eg. ball sports, bike riding etc. Encourage participation in outdoor sport.

**7. Restrict near demands during acute illness.** When energy reserves are low our ability to sustain visual stamina will be reduced. High childhood fevers appear to put the visual system at risk of significant adverse change.

**8. When writing encourage** a 'tripod' pencil grip using the thumb and two next fingers for maximum efficiency. The grip should be high enough along the shaft to allow the point of the pencil to be seen without having to get too close to the page.