

# Watch YOUR EYES

Is it true that using our smartphones, tablets and computers all day will worsen our eyesight? **AZLINDA SAID** gets an expert to set us straight.

## ✓ WHAT COULD AFFECT YOUR EYESIGHT

### → USING YOUR GADGETS FOR HOURS

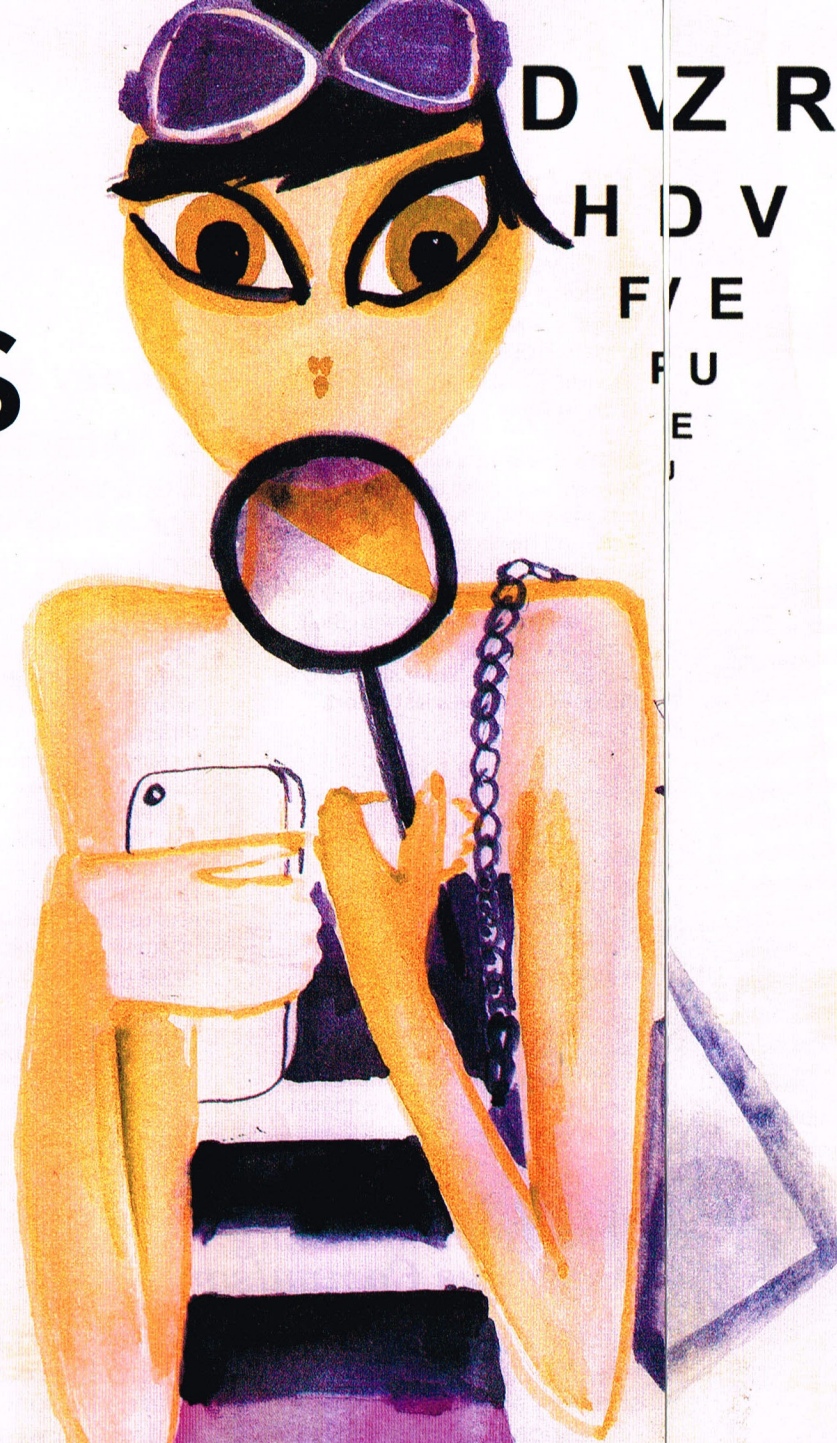
Constant texting, e-mailing and reading online can affect our eyes, says Dr Cordelia Chan, senior consultant and head of refractive surgery service at the Singapore National Eye Centre. She explains: "Using computers and smartphones all the time strains our eyes – especially smartphones, as they have much smaller screens than computers."

Dr Chan clarifies that in adults, eye strain alone won't cause you to become short-sighted as the eyes are already fully developed. However, long-term eye strain can affect the quality of vision – things may look blurred, and we may feel throbbing pain around our eyes. These problems, however, go away when we give our eyes enough rest.

### → STARING HARD AT SCREENS

Dry eyes are a common problem. Dr Chan explains that when we're using our computers and handheld devices, we blink less, focus on one small area, and don't take enough breaks. That can reduce the amount of tears we produce – and it's a problem, because tears moisturise our eyes. "Decreased tear secretion may cause mild discomfort, tearing, blurred vision, or a 'sandy' sensation in your eyes," says Dr Chan.

You can use eye drops for relief, as they act as artificial tears. But



## NEW WAY TO CORRECT YOUR VISION

A vision-correcting surgical procedure called Relex Smile has been available at the Singapore National Eye Centre since February 2012. Like Lasik, it corrects myopia by removing a small amount of corneal tissue to reshape the cornea. But unlike Lasik, which uses two lasers – one to create a flap in the cornea and another to vaporise some corneal tissue under the flap – Relex Smile uses only one laser to remove a little corneal tissue. Relex Smile makes a much smaller incision compared to Lasik. It can also treat short-sightedness of between 100 and 1,000 degrees and astigmatism of up to 500 degrees, and is relatively painless. You may experience slight discomfort post-surgery, but this usually lasts no more than six hours.

## ✗ WHAT WON'T AFFECT YOUR EYESIGHT

### → USING EYE CREAMS

Can eye creams harm our eyes in the long run? No, says Dr Chan, unless you use them wrongly. "Eye creams are for the skin around the eyes, so they should not affect your eyes in any way," she says. "But if your eyes smart, you may be applying the cream too close to the eyelid, allowing it to enter your eyes. If you get a rash, itch, or redness on the skin around the eyes, wash your eyes at once. If your eyes become red, see a doctor, who can prescribe eye drops to solve the problem."

### → AIR-CONDITIONING

Dr Chan says that spending all our time in an air-conditioned environment will not have an effect on our eyesight, although it can make dry eyes feel worse.

### → ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

We spend almost all our time under artificial light – at the office, in malls, and even at home. But Dr Chan says that, contrary to popular belief, long-term exposure to artificial lighting has no impact on your eyes. "It's better to do your work in a well-lit room to avoid straining your eyes," she says. **SH**

the best way is to change your habits, says Dr Chan. "How long you can use the computer depends on individual tolerance. Some people can work continuously for hours without discomfort; others, only for 30 minutes. Whenever your eyes feel uncomfortable or start to tear up, stop," she adds.

### → USING ILLUMINATED DEVICES IN THE DARK

Don't use gadgets in your darkened bedroom at night, advises Dr Chan. "Your pupils act as shutters that control how much light enters your eyes, and they dilate in a dark room. If you're looking at a bright gadget, such as your smartphone or tablet, while your pupils are dilated, too much light will enter your eyes. They will quickly feel tired as they try to cope with the difference between the background darkness and the light source."

Dr Chan adds that watching television in the dark is not as bad, because we usually do it from a distance. In contrast, we tend to hold handheld devices close to our eyes.

### → GOING FOR LASIK SURGERY

Lasik surgery is done to correct myopia or astigmatism, and is generally safe. But it may have side effects, the most common being dry eyes, which usually goes away within a month, says Dr Chan. She adds: "Other side effects include seeing halos and even starbursts. Lasik patients may also experience a drop in their quality of vision, especially at night or in dim places. But these usually disappear in around three months."

## EAT MORE DURIANS AND MARIGOLDS

Did you know that durians contain cataract-fighting vitamin B? And you can take marigolds in supplement form? The flowers have lutein, which combats macular degeneration, so eating them could boost your eyesight, say eye surgeons Dr Jerry Tan and Dr Por Yong Ming in their book, *Nutrition and The Eye*. *Nutrition and The Eye*, \$26, is available at the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped, Jerry Tan Eye Surgery, and Pharmaplus.

