

2020 VISION

By popular demand, blue light glasses have become a staple for online learning, despite the minimal knowledge of actual risks and benefits



TIME FOR A TECH-FREE BREAK

Set reminders to get up from your desk at multiple points throughout the school day



Get out of the house for some fresh air by taking a stroll around your neighborhood



Opt for handwriting your notes in class to counteract your increased screen time



Use the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away, for at least 20 seconds



by campbell wood

With online learning monopolizing the start of the 2020-21 school year, some East students are taking to blue light glasses to protect their eyes from the extended exposure to blue light — potentially harmful light that radiates off of digital screens — despite lack of research proving their effectiveness.

On average, East students spend over eight hours of screen time each day with the new virtual learning method, according to an Instagram poll surveying 260 students. Bill James, the Vice President and General Manager of Healthe, a company that works with blue-filtering technology, states that too much screen exposure can cause symptoms of digital eye strain including headaches, sore eyes and lack of sleep. In an Instagram poll surveying 244 East students, one third said they have purchased blue light glasses since the start of online school.

Blue light glasses are designed to filter out high-energy visible light with lenses crafted to reduce glare. Non-prescription blue light glasses can be purchased for around \$20, and the filter can also be added to current prescription glasses as well.

But are the glasses effective or just a trend?

A report from the American Academy of Ophthalmology says that there is no need for the glasses due to lack of evidence saying blue light is actually harmful. They said the blue light problems the glasses claim to solve — lack of sleep, eye strain and eye disease — can be prevented without spending money on the select eyewear.

The thought of blue light causing these problems is what's made blue light glasses appealing to students.

Freshman Emma Krause heard about the negative effects and eye strain blue light could cause, so she purchased the glasses in an attempt to protect her eyes.

"I was just hoping that if I [had a hard time staring at the

screen] that I would catch it early with the glasses," Krause said. "Just so I wouldn't take any risks."

Krause hasn't experienced any positive or negative effects from the glasses, making it hard to tell if they are actually doing anything. She figures it's better to be overly cautious than risk having eye problems later on.

Senior Stella McKinney thought that blue light glasses were more of a trend than a safety measure. She would joke with her friend who wore them frequently about how they didn't really need them.

"They're just fake glasses," McKinney would tease.

It wasn't until she started experiencing headaches and eye strain from online school that she gave in and bought a pair. Since then, she has noticed a change for the better, and now considers them a virtual school necessity.

"When school shut down, I did [virtual class] for like two weeks and I was like, 'My eyes are straining so bad,'" McKinney said. "So I ordered them...and they work so well, like my head immediately stopped hurting."

Despite the popular demand for the glasses, it's hard to determine if they're actually effective, according to Fairway Eye Center optometrist Dr. Mark Bunde.

According to Bunde, there haven't been enough studies to prove that blue light can actually lead to long-term eye damage. In some cases, he assures, it is possible to experience difficulty sleeping, as blue light has been known to cause a decrease in melatonin levels.

A University of Toronto study concluded that wearing blue light glasses increases melatonin levels and allows glasses users to sleep more soundly.

Sophomore Evyn Roberts noticed longer and more consistent sleep patterns after wearing blue light glasses when on her phone before bed.

"I think [the glasses] definitely helped with [sleep] the most out of anything," Roberts said. "My phone screen isn't

as bright or the light in my room isn't as bright [with the glasses on] when I'm trying to go to bed, so it helps me fall asleep faster."

Bunde says that eye strain is a frequent symptom from staring at a screen for too long.

"Your eyes converge so that the muscles around your eyes are turning in to point towards the object, and are also focusing," Bunde said. "So like any muscle, you flex it for an extended period of time without resting it, you're going to have strain."

Bunde does think the glasses have a dimming effect, and he's had patients who have found it helpful in terms of their experience with eye strain. Despite the lack of research, Bunde says there's no harm in wearing the glasses for precautionary measures. However, Bunde usually recommends certain practices like the 20-20-20 rule — every 20 minutes look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds — before falling back on the glasses.



I like the relief of knowing that I'm prepared and safe to look at the screen for seven hours a day.

weston payne | senior

Senior Weston Payne has been wearing glasses with a blue light filter since eighth grade. While he doesn't have much to compare the experience to, he's grateful to have them now that almost everything has switched to online.

"Constant headaches and just having that pain wouldn't make sense to me," Payne said. "I like the relief of knowing that I'm prepared and safe to look at the screen for seven hours a day."