GADGETS

Is Google Glass Bad For Your Eyes?

LESLIE HORN *3 MAY 2013 11:45 AM*

Google Glass is capable of some amazing things. Just look at this first crop of videos shot wearing a them. But given how much damage you do to your eyes staring at screens in the first place, will Google Glass harm your eyes in the long run?

In a word: no.

Google has a pretty strongly-worded warning for potential wearers under the Glass FAQ section (emphasis added):

> Glass isn't for everyone.
>
> Like when wearing glasses, some people may feel eye strain or get a headache. If you've had Lasik surgery, ask your doctor about risks of eye impact damage before using Glass. Don't let children under 13 use Glass as it could harm developing vision. Also, kids might break Glass or hurt themselves, and Google's terms of service don't permit those under 13 to register a Google account. If Glass is not for you and you wish to return it, do so before the end of the applicable refund period.

So no Glass for kids under 13. But that's basically just legalese with a heaping dose of caution, Dr. Jim Sheedy, Director of Optometric Research at Pacific College of Optometry's Vision Performance Institute told us.

"I don't see any particular reason why smart glasses would be especially harmful to children. The manufacturer warning about usage by children is given out of caution and from a position of legal prudence. As smart glasses become more commonly used, as I expect they will, we will all become more comfortable with advocating their usage by children."

So probably OK for kids, but what about the rest of us?

We already stare at laptops and phones and tablets all day long, which isn't exactly ideal. You've probably experienced eye ache, dry eyes, and other common symptoms of discomfort. But Google Glass is a different use case. While we're married to our computers for hours a day, Google Glass was designed to spend less time in action. Maybe you're always *wearing* Glass, but you only *use* it when you need it, whether you're just responding to a message or listening to Glass tell you to take a right at the next street. There's not a display constantly running in front of your retinas, though. In fact, even if you did use Glass continuously, you'd only get about a full hour of battery life.

Experts aren't particularly concerned. Sheedy said he doesn't foresee any degenerative risks stemming from wearing the glasses and he doesn't see any reason that they would cause any damage to your eye balls.

Glass has some built-in limitations, that, intentional or not, actively limit eye strain. For example, video records in 10-second snippets by default. And you can write a text message just by telling Glass what to say, rather than having to stare at a screen. From that standpoint, your eyes might prefer that you text on Glass rather than your smartphone's LCD. Sure, donning Google Glass might make you look like a cyborg, but it was engineered to get tech out of the way. It's understandably difficult to think of it that way when you're, you know, wearing a computer smack on your face — or looking at someone else who is. But that's another topic entirely.

As far as any real vision problems go, Sheedy says the potential risk posed has more to do with the eye's shift from different visual fields of reality. When you're moving through space, you have certain receptors that tell your brain where you're situated. But when you're given some sort of stimulation — a map flashing before their eyes, for example — the brain gets confused, and that can cause symptoms like dizziness, or in the most extreme cases, nausea, which Sheedy has seen in his the Vision Lab's studies on 3D.

But the spatial recognition problems aren't something most people experience. In a recent Q&A with Google, Harvard ophthalmology professor Dr. Eli Peli says these problems are probably minimal.

"Some people's eyes take a bit longer to adjust to these systems," he said. "That's to be expected. Theories about potentially serious consequences like confusion or disorientation were raised in the media and had echoes in the literature in the 1990s, but they were associated with virtual reality type displays that completely enclosed the viewer."

A Google spokesperson told us in a statement:

"We've studied design comfort and safety very closely, and we haven't found cause for concern. It's something we'll continue to watch carefully. We have been working with ophthalmologists throughout our development process."

Of course, it's only natural that Google's outlook on this is all going to be positive. They're the ones selling the $US1,500 Star Trek shades. And for most of us, this is all still very hypothetical; right now Glass remains in the hands of a very few beta-testing Explorers. But if and when Glass does go mainstream, you shouldn't worry one bit about your eyes. Which is just as well; there are enough cost and privacy concerns to keep you occupied as is.

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WillD @willd *MAY 3, 2013 12:14 PM*

If its using bluetooth or any other radio communication (microwave radiation), it will very slowly fry your frontal lobes. Might take a while.

Reply 0

TUALMASOK Guest *MAY 3, 2013 12:24 PM*

Is that anything like the exposure my brain is already receiving?

Reply 0

Jimmybadsol Guest *MAY 4, 2013 11:04 AM*

Yes, yes it is. In fact the level of radiation you would receive to your frontal lobes is about the same as if you were not wearing them. In fact it's identical.
That's becuse the transmitter is nowhere near the frontal lobe.
It is near the lateral temporal lobe, but it is not close enough to cause any damage.
The power signal being used is similar to that of Bluetooth; and there are no adverse effects from that power signature.
Especially when you would only be using it for a maximum of 1 hr a day (that's a full charge continuous use)

Reply 0

Jackson Bison @jacksonbison *MAY 3, 2013 12:25 PM*

Just wanna mention that while we all believe you'll look like a complete tosser wearing Google Glass, you also look like a complete tosser taking photos with a tablet (along with all the other tablet faux pas).

You can fill in the blanks.

Reply 0

Just This Guy Guest *MAY 3, 2013 12:49 PM*

Only a concern if you give a toss what some other tosser thinks.

Reply 4

bryan @bryan *MAY 4, 2013 10:29 AM*

I would of thought the legality of these in Oz would be of greater concern. Do we need to carry a sign when the camera is on?

Reply 0

droider @droider *MAY 6, 2013 7:32 PM*

Was about to ask this question on Lifehacker. thankfully its already answered thanks!

I want the #HTCOne for its: Screen

Reply 0

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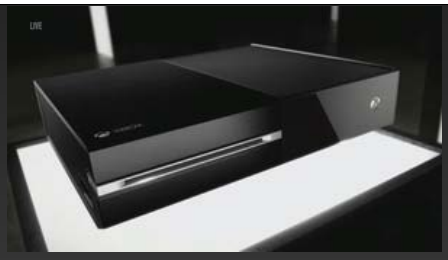

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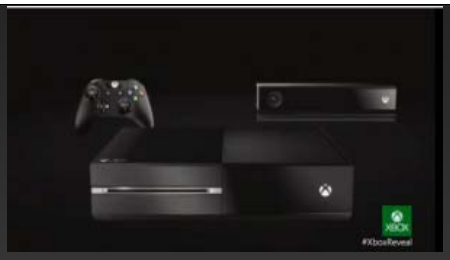

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