

PROTECT EYES WHILE BINGEING HOLIDAY MOVIES

In the USA, the holiday season can mean so many things—and bring up so many emotions. There's the stress of shopping and gift giving. The joy of connecting and reconnecting with friends and family. The sleepiness that comes after overindulging on too much rich food.

But for some, a time-honored holiday tradition is the holiday binge-watching marathon, where everyone gathers in their cozy comfies to watch holiday movies. Everything with a holiday theme—from *Scrooged* to *Die Hard* to *Home Alone* to *A Very Country Christmas*—is fair game for the binge-a-thon.

And this shared family activity is especially popular during the time between Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, when there's time for relaxation after the holiday rush.

However, caring for your eyes never takes a holiday. Binge watching can lead to eye damage from screens and digital eye strain, characterized by tired, red, irritated eyes. And if you're going to be staring at a flickering screen for a long time in one room, even if it's with your loved ones, a few precautions can do wonders for your eye health.

Take these preventive measures against holiday digital eye strain

Here are a few tips from the Mayo Clinic to show you how to protect your eyes from screens:¹

Turn down the room lighting, but not off. While binge watching, soften the other lighting in the viewing room. You can suffer eye damage by staring at a TV set or computer screen in a dark room, since total darkness causes your pupils to dilate, and the light from a screen can penetrate your eyes easier.

Take breaks. Pause the video every now and then. Take a few minutes to pop some popcorn, or get a healthy snack, or (more likely) a less-than-healthy-once-a-year snack. Ideally, every 20 minutes is best, although it may not be popular with your fellow bingers. A compromise is to tell them that for every 20 minutes of viewing, they should look away from the screen—and stretch—for 20 seconds. If you're watching a show with commercials, take advantage of the break in the action to take a quick break.

Limit screen time. Okay, this one is next to impossible during a holiday binge, but maybe ask the gang if that second (or third) movie is really worth it.

Use a humidifier in your viewing room. This adds moisture to the air and helps prevent dry eyes. If you're blasting the heater or have a fire going in the fireplace, adding humidity is especially helpful to counter the eye-drying effects of that harsh indoor heat.

Other helpful hints to prevent eye damage from screens.

Keep everyone hydrated. Break out some hot apple cider, hot chocolate, or other beverage. This will help keep everyone's eyes moistened, and will build in valuable bathroom breaks that give everyone's eyes a rest from the flickering screen.

Consider buying blue light glasses. These eyeglasses filter certain light waves which could cause digital eye strain. You can buy them over-the-counter, so they could make a great gift or stocking stuffer for your binge buddies.

Serve carrots as a movie snack instead of chips. Both have that satisfying crunch for mindless munching, but carrots are full of beta carotene and lutein, which are beneficial for your eyes. You can also serve popcorn, which is lower in fat and calories than chips, has fiber, and allows you to control how much salt you add to it.

Use eye drops. Rohto® Digi Eye® eye drops are specially formulated to relieve the symptoms of digital eye strain that come from binge watching. And those little pink bottles make great stocking stuffers. One precaution: never pass a bottle around for the binging crowd; instead, everyone should have their own bottle.

Some winning suggestions for holiday binge watching

According to the review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, these are the top 5 Christmas movies of all time:²

1. It's a Wonderful Life (1946): This timeless classic stars James Stewart as George Bailey, a man who experiences a series of setbacks, contemplates suicide, and wishes he'd never been born. A guardian angel gives him a chance to see what the world would have been like without him.

2. 8-Bit Christmas (2021): Starring Neil Patrick Harris, this nostalgic comedy flashes back to the 1980s and recounts a boy's efforts to get a Nintendo Entertainment System for Christmas.

3. Miracle on 34th Street (1947): Starring Maureen O'Hara and a young Natalie Wood, this favorite features Edmund Gwenn as a department store Kris Kringle who claims to be the real Santa Claus. He ends up in court, where he tries to prove his sanity—and his authenticity.

4. Holiday Inn (1942): Pairing a singing Bing Crosby with a dancing Fred Astaire, this musical about a performing trio who run a country hotel introduced the iconic holiday song "White Christmas."

5. The Shop Around the Corner (1940): James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan are two department store co-workers who can't stand each other, and fall in love with their respective pen pals—with unforeseen consequences.

¹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/eyestrain/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20372403>

² <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/guide/best-christmas-movies/>

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