

UV Safety Awareness for Your Eyes

Sunlight is one of the greatest threats to your eyes. Studies show that exposure to bright sunlight may increase the risk of developing cataracts, age-related macular degeneration and growths on the eye, including cancer. Unfortunately many people are unaware of the sun's harmful rays.

Remember to always shield eyes from the sun's damaging rays by wearing proper protection outdoors. Also remember to protect eyes from indoor UV light when using tanning beds.

“Protecting your eyes from the sun is as important as protecting your skin,” according to J. Alberto Martinez, MD, an ophthalmologist in Bethesda, Maryland, and a clinical correspondent for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “By wearing UV blocking sunglasses, you can enjoy the summer safely while lowering your risk for potentially blinding eye diseases and tumors.”

The longer the exposure to bright light, the greater the risk is. Excessive exposure to UV light reflected off sand, water or pavement can damage the eyes' front surface. Damage to the eyes from UV light is also a concern with indoor tanning beds. “Corneal burns, cataracts, and, in rare instances, retinal damage can occur”, according to Dr. Martinez. It's important to wear specially made goggles designed for use in tanning booths for protection of the eyes from UV light.

Tips to protect your eyes from the sun:

- Don't focus on color or darkness of sunglass lenses: Select sunglasses that block UV rays. Don't be deceived by color or cost. The ability to block UV light is not dependent on the price tag.
- Choose sunglasses that absorb at least 99 percent to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays. Avoid products with labels that do not state exactly how much UV the product blocks.
Choose wrap-around styles: Ideally, your sunglasses should wrap all the way around to your temples, so the sun's rays can't enter from the side.
- Wear a hat: In addition to your sunglasses, wear a broad-brimmed hat to protect your eyes.
- Don't rely on contact lenses: Even if you wear contact lenses with UV protection, remember your sunglasses.
- Don't be fooled by clouds: The sun's rays can pass through haze and thin clouds. Sun damage to eyes can occur anytime during the year, not just in the summertime.
- Protect your eyes during peak sun times: Sunglasses should be worn whenever outside and it's especially important to wear sunglasses in the early afternoon and at higher altitudes, where UV light is more intense.
- Never look directly at the sun. Looking directly at the sun at any time, including during an eclipse, can lead to solar retinopathy, damage to the eye's retina from solar radiation.

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- Don't forget the kids: Everyone is at risk, including children. Protect their eyes with hats and sunglasses. In addition, try to keep children out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the sun's UV rays are the strongest.

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