

Protect your eyes

Most people think of little more than protecting their skin against sunburn, but you should also protect eyes from sun's UV rays to decrease risk of eye diseases, disorders

Many of us spend a lot of time outdoors and UV protection should be top of mind. Unfortunately, most people think about the protection of their skin, when they should also be considering the safety of their eyes. In fact, according to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) American Eye-Q survey, only one-third of Americans said UV protection is the most important factor they consider when purchasing sunglasses. Whether it's cloudy or sunny, summer or winter, the AOA urges Americans to take measures to protect their eyes from the sun's UV rays in order to decrease the risk of eye diseases and disorders.

"Overexposure to UV rays is quite serious and can lead to cataracts, macular degeneration, or, in some cases, skin cancer around the eyelids," said Sarah Hinkley, O.D., the AOA's UV protection expert. "Other disorders that can occur are abnormal growths on the eye's surface and even sunburn of the eyes. These conditions can cause blurred vision, irritation, redness, tearing, temporary vision loss and, in some instances, blindness."

Even more concerning is the lack of awareness surrounding the potential effects of overexposure to UV radiation. According to the American Eye-Q survey, 35% of adults are unaware of the eye health risks associated with spending too much time in the sun without the proper protection.

Protect them

The following top five tips from the American Optometric Association may help prevent eye and vision damage from overexposure to UV radiation:

1. Wear protective eyewear any time the eyes are exposed to UV rays, even on cloudy days and during the winter.
2. Look for quality sunglasses or contact lenses that offer good protection. Sunglasses or protective contact lenses should block 99 to 100% of UV-A and UV-B radiation and screen out 75 to 90% of visible light.
3. Check to make sure sunglass lenses are perfectly matched in colour and free of distortions or imperfections.
4. Purchase gray-coloured lenses because they reduce light intensity without altering the colour of objects to provide the most natural colour vision. Brown or amber-coloured lenses may be better for those who are visually impaired because they increase contrast as well as reducing light intensity.
5. Don't forget protection for young children and teenagers, who typically spend more time in the sun than adults and are at a greater risk for damage.

Children need protection too

"The lenses of children's eyes are more transparent than those of adults allowing shorter wavelength light to reach the retina," said Dr. Hinkley. "Because the effects of solar radiation are cumulative, it's important to develop good protection habits early, such as purchasing proper sunglasses for young children and teenagers."

According to the AOA, parents should purchase sunglasses for all children, including infants.

The American Eye-Q survey found 66% of Americans purchase sunglasses for their children, but more than one in four parents do not check to make sure the lenses have proper UV protection. Additionally, less than one third (29%) of parents make sure their child wears sunglasses while outdoors.

www.aoa.org/x4735.xml

aoa.org/documents/SunglassShoppingGuide0810.pdf

Source: American Optometric Association

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