

UV Awareness

The Damaging Effects of Ultraviolet Light on Your Eyes

As the ozone layer is depleting, UV radiation is increasing. And right along with it the risk of eye damage. During the summer, UV radiation is three times as strong as it is during the winter. With the damaging effects, it is more important than ever to protect your eyes year-round.

There are two different types of UV rays: UV-A rays, which can damage part of the retina at the back of your eye called the macula and UV-B rays, which damage the cornea and lens. Over exposure to damaging UV rays can cause a number of diseases, including:

- Snow blindness (photokeratitis) - reflections off of water, pavement, snow or exposure to artificial light sources, like tanning beds, can cause a burn to the cornea. Although the effect is temporary, it is painful and eyes will appear red, be sensitive to light and be teary.
- Cataracts - clouding of the eye's lens and can cause blurred vision. 20.5 million Americans have cataracts.¹
- Macular degeneration - deterioration of the central area of the retina, the macula. Results in blurred, distorted vision and blind spots. 1.8 million Americans are affected.²
- Pterygium - growth in the corner of the eye that is usually non-cancerous, it can block vision and grow over the cornea. Surgery is often required.
- Skin cancer around the eyelid - most common on the lower lid but can occur anywhere around the eye, the most common type is basal cell carcinoma. The effects of UV rays aren't always seen right away, so it is important to protect yourself now.

The best ways to protect yourself against UV radiation:

- Wear sunglasses that block 99-100% of UV rays whenever you go outside, whether it's cloudy or sunny.
- Lenses should wrap around your face to block more of the UV rays.
- When it comes to UV protection, bigger is better, bigger lenses will shield more of your eye. Wear a wide-brimmed hat to block UV rays from the top and sides.
- Contact lens wearers can get lenses that filter out a lot of the UV rays, but they are not a replacement for sunglasses.
- If you wear prescription glasses, photochromic lenses are another option - they darken when exposed to UV light.

For detection against these diseases, it is important to schedule a routine eye examination with your eye care provider and remember, slip on those shades when you head outdoors.

Source:

(1) The National Eye Institute (www.nei.gov/news), 2005

(2) American Health Assistance Foundation (www.ahaf.org/macular), 2006

