

5 tips to protect your eyes from the sun

Most of us know the sun is bad for our skin, but did you know the sun wreaks havoc on the eyes, too? You may not be able to slather your eyes in sunscreen, but you can help shield them.

When it comes to protecting our skin from the sun, our options are as limitless as the rays beating down on us. Sunscreen comes in lotion, spray or stick form. It can have UVA and UVB filters. It's waterproof, sweatproof, anti-aging, hypoallergenic and tear-free. SPF ranges from 5 to 100. It can be found in makeup, lip balm, moisturizers – you name it.

But sunscreen is not designed for your eyes. At least not yet. It's still just as important to protect your eyes from the sun's harmful rays as it is to shield your skin.

Ultraviolet rays can lead to numerous health problems ranging from skin cancer around the eye to pink eye. They can also cause cataracts, photokeratitis (a kind of sunburn of the cornea) and pterygium (a white or creamy fleshy growth on the surface of the eye).¹

Most of us realize that staring into the sun for long periods of time isn't good for our long-term vision. But its rays actually reach our eyes in a variety of ways. Fresh snow, for instance, reflects as much as 80% of UV radiation, which means we can damage our eyes even by looking down...even in the winter.² Sea foam reflects about 25% of UV radiation, dry sand about 15%. Even grass, soil and water reflect UV rays (less than 10%).³

Researchers estimate we receive 80% of our lifetime exposure to UV rays before age 18. Compared to their parents, children have larger pupils (allowing more light into their eyes) and clearer lenses. Plus, kids are outside without eye protection more frequently and for longer periods than most adults.⁴

So what should you do to protect your eyes and your children's eyes? Here are 5 tips:

KNOW WHEN THE SUN IS STRONGEST

The highest ultraviolet radiation exposure for eyes and skin is actually in the morning and mid-afternoon, rather than at noon. Sun exposure to the eyes tends to be more continual in fall, winter and spring when the sun is lower in the sky.⁵



81%

Lifetime exposure to UV rays before the age of 18⁴

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WEAR THE RIGHT LENSES

Don't skimp when it comes to sunglasses. Choose high-quality sunglasses with adequate UV protection to help reduce glare from protective surfaces.

WEAR THE RIGHT FRAMES

While most sunglasses can help block UV rays from entering through the lenses, most frame styles do not prevent rays from reaching the sides, top and bottom of the glasses.⁶

DOUBLE UP

Hats with brims offer no protection from UV rays reflected up from surfaces such as pavement, sand, water, etc. A combination of shades and a hat is best.⁶

WEAR THE RIGHT CONTACTS

Contacts that protect against UV rays are classified into 2 categories: Class I and Class II. Class I UV-blockers provide the greatest measure of UV protection.⁷ Talk with your eye doctor about the best UV-blocking contact lens options for you.

So the next time you're applying sunscreen, make sure you're protecting your eyes, too.

¹"How can UV rays damage your eyes?" Prevent Blindness, <http://www.preventblindness.org/how-can-uv-rays-damage-your-eyes>. Accessed April 2019.

²"How to educate patients about UV protection this winter," American Optometric Association, <https://www.aoa.org/news/clinical-eye-care/how-to-educate-patients-about-uv-protection-this-winter?sso=y>. Accessed December 2019.

³UV radiation," World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/uv/faq/whatisuv/en/index3.html>. Accessed December 2019.

⁴"Protecting children from ultraviolet radiation," World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/uv/resources/archives/fs261/en>. Archived 11 December 2009. Accessed December 2019.

⁵Sasaki H. UV exposure to eyes greater in morning, late afternoon. Proc. 111th Ann. Meeting Japanese Ophthalmologic Soc., Osaka, Japan, April, 2007.

⁶"Recommended types of sunglasses," American Academy of Ophthalmology, <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/glasses-contacts/sunglasses-recommended-types>. Accessed December 2019.

⁷"UV protection with contact lenses," American Optometric Association, <https://www.aoa.org/patients-and-public/caring-for-your-vision/uv-protection/uv-protection-with-contact-lenses>. Accessed December 2019.

