Don't fry your eyes in the sun: NetWellness

When it comes to being in the sun, did you know that you need to protect your vision as well as your skin from overexposure to the sun? You are outside. Putting on sunglasses and applying sunscreen takes only a few minutes and helps avoid dangerous sunburns and future vision issues, such as cataracts or macular degeneration.

How can you lower the risk of developing UV-related eye disease and disorders?

The best defense for everyone is to wear brimmed hats and sunglasses that screen 99 to 100 percent of UV rays. Brimmed hats alone will block about 50 percent of UV radiation. Ideally, all types of eyewear should absorb at least the full spectrum of UV rays including UV-A and UV-B. The degree of UV protection is not necessarily related to the price of the sunglasses. Most rigid contact lenses also provide UV protection -- but because contact lenses don't cover the entire eye, it's still important to wear sunglasses when you're outdoors.
Consider the following tips when choosing a pair of shades:

- Buy from a reputable retailer: Their products will meet frame and lens quality criteria set by the American National Standards Institute.
- Look for UV protection: Sunglasses should filter UVA and UVB light.
- Buy sunglasses that are labeled: "absorbs 99-100 percent of UV-A and UV-B rays."
- Try the sunglasses on: Fit and feel make a difference because sunglasses that are uncomfortable are less likely to worn.
- Use multiple pairs: Different lenses and frames may be suited to various types of activities.
- Understand lens color: The darkness of a lens has nothing to do with UV protection, although various lens colors can offer other benefits. For instance, yellow- and brown-tinted lenses are best when for water sports; gray, brown and amber are great for field sports; and mirror coatings work well for downhill skiing and snowboarding.
- Focus on design: For extra protection, wraparound glasses or glasses with larger temple pieces help block the sun from side angles.

**How about eye protection for children and teens?**

According to the World Health Organization, children are more exposed to the sun than adults. Estimates suggest up to 80 percent of a person's lifetime exposure to UV rays is received before the age of 18.

Children and teenagers are particularly susceptible to the sun's damaging rays because they typically spend more time outdoors than adults, and the lenses of their eyes are more transparent than those of adults. The transparent lenses allow shorter wavelength light to reach the retina of the eye.

It is very important to keep several things in mind in particular when buying sunglasses for children. Kid's glasses should be made of unbreakable polycarbonate. (unless glass is required by the eye doctor). The frames should be bendable and the lenses should not pop out. Check to make sure the glasses fit well, because children will not wear glasses that don't fit well. It is best to have the child try the glasses on and make sure they shield enough of the eye above, below and on the sides.

The **UV Learning Center** offers free information on the dangers of UV, how to purchase the best sunglasses for adults and children, and other related topics.
Effects of Ultraviolet (UV) exposure on your eyes

Both UV-A and UV-B radiation have been shown to be harmful to the eye. While UV-A has lower energy, it does penetrate deep into the eye and may injure the macula, the part of the retina responsible for sight in the center field of vision. UV-B radiation is presumably more dangerous because it is short wavelength radiation with higher energy. UV-B is mainly absorbed by the cornea and lens of the eye and can damage those tissues.

Basal cell carcinoma is the most common type of skin cancer to affect the eyelids and may appear on the lower lid, in the corners of the eye and under eyebrows.

Symptoms of a corneal sunburn will usually not appear until 6-12 hours after exposure. So, you can suffer a severe corneal sunburn and not realize it immediately after. The risk is greatest during midday hours from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and even during overcast days. Altitude increases radiation with an increase in intensity of 16 percent for every 1000 meters above sea level.

This article is based, in part, on information provided by Prevent Blindness Ohio and was adapted for use on NetWellness with permission.

Related topics: netwellness, sun, uv rays