



Vision Care: UV Protection

The sun releases energy, called radiation, in various forms: in the sunlight you see, the heat you feel and the invisible ultraviolet (UV) rays that cause sunburn. UV rays from the sun can also damage your eyes and hurt your vision.

Dangers of UV Rays

There are two types of UV radiation: UVA rays and UVB rays. UVB rays are more likely to cause sunburn, but UVA rays penetrate deeper. Exposure to either can damage your eyes. Long-term exposure to UV rays can result in eye problems that may lead to vision loss from conditions like cataracts or macular degeneration. Other dangers include skin cancer (around the eyelids) and corneal sunburn. Long hours at the beach or ski slope without proper eye protection can cause corneal sunburn, which can be very painful and may cause temporary vision loss.

Exposure Risk Factors

Everyone is at risk for eye damage from UV radiation. The risk of sun-related eye problems, however, is higher for people who:

- Spend long hours in the sun
 - Have had cataract surgery or have certain retina disorders
 - Are on certain medications, such as tetracycline, sulfa drugs, birth control pills, diuretics and tranquilizers that increase the eye's sensitivity to light
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Proper Eye Protection

Adequately protecting your eyes from the sun, and other elements like wind or water, is crucial to maintaining your vision and eye health.

- Use everyday eyewear that absorbs UV rays. All types of eyewear, including prescription and nonprescription glasses, contact lenses and lens implants, should absorb UVA and UVB rays. For UV protection in everyday eyewear, there are several options like UV-blocking lens materials, coatings and photochromic lenses.
 - Select the right sunglasses. Sunglasses help in two important ways: they filter light, and they protect the eyes from damaging UV rays. Look for labels that state they block 99%-100% of UVA and UVB rays. They should also reduce glare, protect your entire eye area, be comfortable to wear and don't distort color. Be aware that if you are at the beach or on the ski slope, you should wear sunglasses with a darker tint to block more light. Your risk of eye damage from the sun is greater because of reflection off the water and snow.
 - Wear a brimmed hat or cap. A wide-brimmed hat or cap will block about half of UV rays, and also limit UV rays that hit the eyes from above or around glasses.
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