

The Summer Sun and Your Eyes

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Keep an Eye on Ultraviolet (UV) Safety

Eye medical doctors (ophthalmologists) caution us that too much exposure to UV light raises the risks of eye diseases, including cataract, macular degeneration, growths on the eye, and cancer.

Growths on the eye, such as pterygium, can show up in our teens or twenties, especially in surfers, skiers, fishermen, farmers, or anyone who spends long hours under the mid-day sun or in the UV-intense conditions found near rivers, oceans, and mountains.

Diseases like cataract, age-related macular degeneration, and eye cancers can take many years to develop, but each time we're out in the sun without protection we could be adding damage that adds to our risks for these serious disorders. Babies and kids need to wear hats and sunglasses for this very reason. People of all ages should take precautions whenever they are outdoors.

Summer sunlight can show us lots of beautiful and fun things, but it can also do us harm. At the National Institutes of Health, eye doctor Rachel Bishop says that sunlight's ultraviolet rays can damage some tissues in the eye:

"It can lead to changes that produce a great deal of discomfort on the surface of the eye. And we understand now that it can lead to increased rates of cataract."

Dr. Bishop recommends sunglasses marked for 99 or 100 percent protection against potentially harmful UVA and UVB rays. Those UV rays can also raise the risk of skin cancer, so covering your eyes works like covering your skin, to give you the benefit of good times outside while reducing your risk of serious trouble later.

Follow these tips to protect your eyes from the sun all year long:

- Sun damage to eyes can occur anytime during the year, not just in the summertime, so be sure to wear UV-blocking sunglasses and broad-brimmed hats whenever you're outside.
- Don't be fooled by clouds: the sun's rays can pass through haze and thin clouds.
- Never look directly at the sun. Looking directly at the sun at any time, including during an eclipse, can lead to solar retinopathy, which is damage to the eye's retina from solar radiation.

- Don't forget the kids and older family members: everyone is at risk, including children and senior citizens. Protect their eyes with hats and sunglasses.

Protect your Vision All Year Round

- Have a comprehensive dilated eye exam every year. It may help you see better and could identify common eye diseases that have no warning signs.
- Know your family's eye health history. Many eye diseases are hereditary so you may be at a higher-than-average risk of being affected.
- Eat right to protect your sight. Eat a diet rich in fruit and vegetables, particularly dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, or collard greens, and fish high in omega-3 fatty acids such as salmon, tuna, and halibut.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight can increase inflammation in your body and increase your risk of developing other diseases.
- Exercise daily or as often as you can, especially aerobic exercises, to improve your immune system and blood pressure and your eye and brain health.
- Maintain normal blood pressure of 120/80. Having cardiovascular disease has been linked to an increased risk for macular degeneration.
- Wear protective eyewear when sports or tasks at home or at work may lead to damage.
- Quit smoking or never start. Toxins found in cigarette smoke have been linked to an increased risk for developing a number of diseases, including macular degeneration.
- Wear high quality sunglasses that have "99- to 100-percent UVA and UVB protection" and a wide-brimmed hat as often as possible when you are outdoors to lower your risk for cancer, macular degeneration, and other eye diseases. If you aren't sure about your shades, ask your optometrist or optician to check their protection level.
- Give your eyes a rest. Reduce eyestrain by looking away from your monitor or other near work every 20 minutes, to a distance of 20 feet in front of you, for 20 seconds.
- Limit caffeine. Some reports indicate it may have a small effect on blood pressure.
- Take all medications, as prescribed. Have one pharmacy or doctor confirm that the drugs have no risks for interactions or interference from non-prescription drugs or herbal supplements.

[\(Source: American Academy of Ophthalmology and National Glaucoma Research\)](#)

Contact [Sullivan Benefits](#) to explore various ways to educate your employees about the importance of protecting their eyes all year round.

Congratulations, just taking the time to read this article is a positive step toward introducing wellness and the benefits available from a healthier lifestyle. Thank you for your time and **THINK WELLNESS!**