2020

PRESS RELEASE

For More Information:
ELLEN G. DUYSEN
Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health
University of Nebraska Medical Center
College of Public Health, Room 3035
984388 Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, NE 68198-4388
402.552.3394

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

By UNMC, Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, Omaha, NE

SUNSCREEN FOR YOUR EYES?
Even "cheap" sunglasses can help block UV light.

You don't need to spend a fortune to protect your eyes from the sun. Even those $14.99 sunglasses offer good protection if the label indicates they will block 100% UV (ultraviolet) light.

Dr. Arvind Saini, a clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) recommends reviewing sunglass labels to ensure they can block UV light. He further recommends wearing oversized sunglasses that help block UV light from reaching the surface and entering the eyes as well as reaching the surrounding skin.

"Just as sunscreen helps protect against sunburn, wrinkling and skin cancer, sunglasses help protect your eyes, eyelids and surrounding tissue from UV damage," Saini says. "UV light breaks down the collagen in our skin, leading to aging and deterioration of the skin. It can also lead to degenerations and cancers in and around the eye."

Sunlight is strongest mid-day to early afternoon, stronger at higher altitudes and more intense when reflected off ice or snow. The sun is the main source of UV radiation and its damaging effects.

Several decades ago, scientists were concerned that atmospheric depletion was resulting in greater UV radiation reaching the earth's surface. In recent years, those concerns have eased, as the earth's ozone layer has improved with the elimination of the use of certain chemicals.

There are several ways UV light can damage our eyes. Sun reflecting off water can cause a painful sunburn called photokeratitis on the front part of the eye (cornea). It causes redness, blurry vision, light sensitivity and pain.

The conjunctiva is the term for layer of skin that covers the surface of the white of our eyes. When damaged by UV radiation, this skin layer may develop nodules (pinguecula) or surface growths (pterygium) over time. UV light also plays a role in accelerating cataract development, which is a deterioration of the lens in our eye.

"UV damage to the back of our eyes, our retina, plays a role in age-related macular degeneration," Saini says. "With high levels of UV exposure, certain cancers may also develop in the back of the eye."

Never look directly at the sun, especially during an eclipse. Doing so can lead to solar retinopathy, which is damage to the eye's retina from solar radiation. This can result in a permanent blind spot in your vision.

While we need to protect our eyes from overexposure to UV light, sunlight isn't bad. Our eyes need daily exposure to natural light to help maintain normal sleep-wake cycles. Natural light has also been lined to reducing the development of near-sightedness in children and skin exposure to

sunlight is important for our body to produce vitamin D.

Changes in the eyes due to UV exposure isn't limited to aging adults. People can sometimes see visible damage in their 20's. UV radiation damage accumulates over our lifetime. Even on cloudy days, UV radiation isn't blocked or diminished. Whenever we are outside, sunglasses are a necessary part of protecting our eyes throughout the year.

"To fully protect your eyes from sun exposure, use 100% UV sunblocking sunglasses and a wide brimmed hat," Saini says.

When shopping for glasses, look for a sticker or tag stating that the glasses block 99% to 100% of both UVA and UVB radiation. Oversized, wraparound styles help keep UV from entering the eyes from the side.

Sunglasses that come with amber, green or gray lenses don't block more sun, but they can increase contrast. This may be useful for athletes playing sports such as baseball or golf.

Polarization reduces glare from reflective surfaces such as water or pavement. It does not offer additional protection from the sun but can make activities such as driving or being on the water safer and more enjoyable.

When shopping for sunglasses, don't forget kids. They need protection from UV light, too.

To maintain the quality of sunglasses, regardless of the price invested, use a hard-shell case. When your lenses are dirty, clean them with warm water and diluted dish detergent. Dry them with a soft, clean, lint-free cloth. Don't use solutions containing either alcohol or acetone, because they can

damage the lens coating. A clean microfiber cloth can also be used to safely keep sunglasses clean.

When left in a hot car, some sunglasses may sustain damage to the anti-glare and anti-scratch coatings. Frames may also be damaged from high heat. However, the UV quality of the sunglasses should not be affected.

“When you’re in the car, your photochromatic lenses may not darken,” Saini says. “They change in response to UV light. Most car windshields block UV light, so your lenses won’t darken. If your phtotochromactic (a common name is “transition) glasses don’t provide wide-field protection, you can purchase ‘fitover’ sunglasses that fit over prescription glasses.”

“Wearing sunglasses is an easy way to protect our eyes for a lifetime,” Saini adds. “It is a pro-active step that reduces the risk of any diseases. If you have concerns about your eyes, please schedule a visit with your ophthalmologist.”

Additional eye protection information is available at https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/sun.

Funding for this educational article comes from the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.