

Proper UV protection for your eyes is important for summer

June 20 2006



Because it takes years of UV radiation exposure to contribute to the formation of a cataract or damage in the retina, it's very important to get sunglasses with UV protection, to wear them at an early age and to keep wearing them as you get older, says an optometrist at Washington University's School of Medicine. Photo courtesy of WUSTL

We all know the importance of using sunscreen to protect our skin from the sun's harmful rays, but what about protection for our eyes? July is UV Safety Month and prolonged exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays without protection may cause eye conditions that can lead to vision loss, such as cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. Sunglasses and

wide-brimmed hats are your best protection against UV-related vision problems, but be careful when you're shopping for sunglasses -- the wrong kind of lenses might do more harm than good.

Mary Migneco, O.D., an instructor in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the university's School of Medicine says that "The darkness that you see in sunglasses cuts out the visible UV rays. What's really harmful to your eyes, however, is the invisible UV, or ultraviolet radiation."

Migneco says that because tinted lenses block the glare from sunlight, sunglasses that don't have UV protection can actually contribute to eye damage.

"When the visible light rays are cut out, your pupil will dilate in order to allow more light into your visual system. If they are not UV protected, the sunglasses are actually doing more harm than good," says Migneco, who sees patients at the BJC Vision Center in St. Louis. "You're letting in more of the harmful UV rays by having your pupil dilated."

So, Migneco says it's important to look for labels on sunglasses and make sure the lenses are coated so that they block both types of UV radiation: UVA and UVB.

"UVB are more harmful than UVA, and they can lead to formation of cataracts and a condition on the back of the eye called macular degeneration. We want to be protected from both UVA and UVB rays. Generally speaking, anything marketed as UV protected is protected against both," adds Migneco.

If sunglasses are UV protected, they will have a sticker on them labeled from OSHA that says they are UVA and UVB protected. If there's no label on the lens, don't assume they are, Migneco warns., and, doctor's

across the nation are urging Americans to protect their eyes and their children's eyes by wearing sunglasses and wide-brimmed hats.

Source: WUSTL

Citation: Proper UV protection for your eyes is important for summer (2006, June 20) retrieved 10 April 2024 from

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