

Many Americans putting vision at risk from sun damage

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Three-quarters of Americans are concerned about potential eye problems from the sun's ultraviolet rays, yet only 31 percent protect their eyes with sunglasses or other UV-protective eyewear every time they go outside, according to a new nationwide survey released today. The report by The Vision Council, based on a survey of more than 10,000 adults, finds 34 percent of adults have experienced symptoms of prolonged UV exposure, such as eye irritation, trouble seeing, and red or swollen eyes.

"UV damage to your eyes can start in as little as 15 minutes," said Justin Bazan, OD, medical adviser to The Vision Council. "Many Americans have a 'passive' relationship with their sunglasses, and they don't realize the dangerous health consequences that can occur from overexposure to

the sun's rays without the right eye protection."

The report, *Spare Your Sight: Using Shades for Protection and Style*, shows that even though Americans fear vision loss, taking the protective measure of wearing sunglasses is not a high priority. Sunglasses are often forgotten or just not kept on hand, while the protective value of sunscreen and hats to shield skin from UV damage seems to be better understood and more frequently practiced. In the survey, Americans were much more likely to identify the long-term effects of the sun on skin - such as skin cancer (51 percent) and sunburn (42 percent) - compared with the serious UV impacts on vision, such as sunburned eyes (31 percent), cataracts (26 percent) or age-related macular degeneration (21 percent).

These knowledge gaps and misunderstandings are putting Americans' vision health at risk. Dangerous sight-threatening disorders, such as cataracts and macular degeneration, are associated with longer-term eye damage, but short-term effects of UV can be felt after spending a long day outside or even after a few hours of intense, unprotected exposure. These irritating and painful conditions include photokeratitis (sunburn of the eye) and pterygium (a growth on the surface of the eye), and cause eyes to become bloodshot, irritated, swollen, or hyper-sensitive to light.

Americans' habits and excuses may be to blame - many are only sporting sunglasses when they are outside for two or more hours (39 percent). Additionally, during outdoor activities in which UV-eye protection is vital, (particularly between the hours of 8 to 10 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m.) Americans are leaving their eyes exposed: only 14 percent are likely to wear sunglasses while watching outdoor sporting events and only 44 percent are likely to wear sunglasses at the beach.

UV radiation is present throughout the year, on sunny days and cloudy ones, too. Further, elements such as water, grass, concrete, and snow can

powerfully reflect UV light, which can be virtually as harmful as direct UV.

"Many consumers make sunglass purchases based on style and comfort, but when choosing a pair of sunglasses, it's vital to check the label to make sure lenses are UVA/UVB protective," said Mike Daley, the CEO of The Vision Council. "By highlighting the cumulative and irreversible damage UV overexposure can cause, we hope to encourage Americans to make UV-eye protection an everyday habit to preserve their eyesight."

Other key findings from the survey include:

- Americans place comfort (65 percent) and affordability (54 percent) before UV protection (44 percent) when purchasing sunglasses.
- Parents are more likely to wear shades always or often (56 percent) than their children (29 percent).
- Many adults who rarely or never wear sunglasses (25 percent) report that they skip UV eye protection because they don't own prescription sunglasses (41 percent).
- Millennials are least likely to protect their vision: 55 percent of people in their 20s never, rarely or only sometimes wear sunglasses.

To mitigate the risks of UV-related eye damage, The Vision Council recommends the following:

- Apply your knowledge - Make UV protection a crucial consideration when buying sunglasses.
- Consider your options - Look for lenses and frames designed for specific activities and lifestyles.
- Know where to go - Purchase sunglasses only from a reputable source and look for a label on the lens or frame indicating UVA

and UVB protection.

To view or download a copy of the report, Spare Your Sight: Using Shades for Protection and Style, visit <http://www.thevisioncouncil.org/uv>

The Vision Council commissioned the VisionWatch Survey in December 2015, surveying 10,279 adults 18 and older about their sunglass use and habits, and knowledge about the dangers of UV radiation through an online survey tool.

Provided by GYMR

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