

Protect your eyes from summer's dangers

June 17 2024, by Ernie Mundell



Summertime is primetime for the great outdoors, but that can mean new hazards for your eyes, one expert warned.

Simple steps can help cut the risk, said ophthalmologist Dr. Masih Ahmed, an assistant professor of ophthalmology at the Baylor College of

Medicine in Houston.

Out in the sun

This one has an easy fix: Sunglasses. According to Ahmed, strong sunlight can lead to what's known as pterygium, growths within the eye and UV (ultraviolet) light has been linked to upped risks for early cataracts, worsened [macular degeneration](#) and even cancer of the eyelid.

In a Baylor news release, he said that "when choosing the right sunglasses, make sure the lenses are 100% UV blocking, ideally wrapping around the face to avoid light protruding from the sides. UV-blocking sunglasses with full coverage over the eyes is key."

Polarized lenses can also help, since they help cut down on glare—especially useful when you're out on the water.

Sunscreen and your eyes

The [American Cancer Society](#) currently recommends a broad-spectrum [sunscreen](#) with SPF 30 or higher, reapplied at least every two hours. Wearing hats and long-sleeved shirts can also help, and seek out shade if possible.

"In warm temperatures where sweating is inevitable, find a sunscreen that does not run when you sweat to avoid getting it into the eyes," according to Ahmed. "If sunscreen gets in your eye, rinse it out with sterile saline or fresh water to irrigate it. The irrigation process might be uncomfortable, but it will help wash out the sunscreen."

Swimming dangers

A jump in a pool, a lake or the ocean is so welcome on a hot day. But bacterial, fungal and other [infection](#) dangers can lurk in the water.

According to Ahmed, your eyes' best defense are swim goggles.

"There's risk of different microorganisms, specifically one that is difficult to treat called acanthamoeba, which is a parasite that can cause eye infections," he said.

Still bodies of water, especially, can harbor such pathogens. Avoid opening the eyes when underwater, to help protect them.

"The eye is not great at fighting off different types of infections because it doesn't have available blood supply to it," Ahmed explained. "If you have scratches in the cornea, which can happen from dry eye or even rubbing your eye, one of those microorganisms can get into those cuts and lead to infection."

And don't wear contact lenses while swimming, he said. According to the Baylor news release, "contact lenses absorb water and hold onto harmful microorganisms that cause infection. Contacts cause micro-abrasions in the eye, which facilitate eye infections."

If you must wear [contact lenses](#) while swimming, use the disposable kind you can get rid of soon after getting out of the water.

Mowing and other lawn care

A [lawn mower](#) can easily kick up pebbles and other debris that could severely injure the eye, Ahmed said. Wearing goggles while mowing can protect you from that danger.

Washing your hands after gardening is also advised, because common

plants like milkweed can irritate the eyes.

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