

Sunglasses, More Than a Fashion Statement

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

Recent studies have shown that prolonged exposure to the sun's invisible, high-energy ultraviolet rays without protection may cause eye conditions that can lead to vision loss, such as cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. During the summer months the level of ultraviolet radiation is three times greater than in the winter.

Sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat are the best defense system for your eyes against sunlight and harmful UV rays. To be effective, both must be worn every time you're outside for prolonged periods of time, even when it's overcast.

But what type of sunglasses should you buy? The most important thing is to purchase sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B rays. Don't be misled by the color of the lens or the price tag dangling from the frame.

The ability to block UV light is not dependent on the darkness of the lens. UV protection can come from adding chemicals to the lens material during manufacturing or from a chemical coating applied to the lens surface. And as for the cost, many \$10 sunglasses provide equal or greater protection than a \$100 pair. With expensive sunglasses, you're paying for style, frame quality and options such as scratch-resistant coatings, and not necessarily protective UV ray blocking ability.

In addition to the damage caused by repeated sun exposure overtime, you need to protect your eyes from acute damage caused by a single day in the sun. Excessive exposure to ultraviolet light reflected off sand, snow or pavement can burn the eye's surface. Similar to sunburns, eye surface burns usually disappear within a couple of days, but may lead to further complications later in life.

Eye health care is provided by the three "O's" – opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists. It is the ophthalmologist, or Eye M.D., who can treat it all – eye diseases and injuries, and perform eye surgery.