

Source: <http://www.aoa.org/x12843.xml>



American Optometric Association

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KEEP AN EYE ON HARMFUL UV RAYS

Survey reveals that the majority of Americans don't consider UV protection the most important factor when purchasing sunglasses

ST. LOUIS, MO, May 26, 2009 – Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is a concern for many Americans, but most people are thinking about protecting their skin, not their eyes. Whether it's a cloudy or sunny day, summer or winter, the American Optometric Association (AOA) reminds Americans to take specific measures to protect their eyes from the sun's UV rays in order to decrease the risk of vision disorders.

The sun's primary danger is in the form of UV radiation. UV radiation is a component of solar radiation, but can be given off by artificial sources like tanning beds.

According to the AOA's 2008 American Eye-Q® survey, which identified Americans' attitudes and behaviors regarding eye care and related issues, only 49 percent of Americans said UV protection was the most important factor when purchasing sunglasses. Respondents said that the price and style of sunglasses were among the most important factors to them.

"Overexposure to UV rays has been linked to a variety of problems, including age-related cataracts and degeneration of the cornea," said Gregory W. Good, O.D., PhD, optometrist and AOA's UV Protection Expert. "Other disorders that can occur are abnormal growths on the eye's surface and even sunburn of the eyes. These conditions can cause blurred vision, irritation, redness, tearing, temporary vision loss and, in some instances, blindness."

According to Dr. Good, the effects of solar radiation are cumulative; therefore optometrists recommend parents purchase proper eyewear for young children and teenagers. The longer the eyes are exposed to solar radiation, the greater risk a person has for developing conditions later in life such as cataracts or macular degeneration.

It is not clear how much exposure to solar radiation will cause damage, so the AOA recommends wearing quality sunglasses that offer proper UV protection and a wide-brimmed hat whenever people spend time outdoors. Also, certain contact lenses incorporate an ultraviolet blocker in the lens, which helps further reduce exposure to UV light that eventually can cause cataracts and other eye problems. Patients can ask their optometrist for additional information about these contact lenses.

The following **top five tips from the American Optometric Association** can help prevent eye damage from exposure to UV radiation:

1. Wear protective eyewear any time the eyes are exposed to UV rays, even on cloudy days and during the winter.
2. Look for quality sunglasses or contact lenses that offer good protection. Sunglasses or protective contact lenses should block out 99 to 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B radiation and screen out 75 to 90 percent of visible light.
3. Check to make sure sunglass lenses are perfectly matched in color and free of distortions or imperfections.
4. Purchase gray-colored lenses because they reduce light intensity without altering the color of objects to provide the most natural color vision.
5. Don't forget protection for young children and teenagers, who typically spend more time in the sun than adults and thus are at greater risk for damage.

Additionally, be sure to schedule [periodic comprehensive eye exams](#) with an eye doctor. It's a good way to monitor eye health, maintain good vision, and keep up-to-date on the latest in UV radiation protection.

Other interesting facts from the American Eye-Q® survey include:

- 46 percent of survey respondents have worn lenses (contacts lenses or regular glasses) that provide UV protection.
- 35 percent of respondents wear prescription sunglasses.
- Some respondents understand that dry eye (32 percent), temporary blindness (30 percent), and sunburn (29 percent) can result from overexposure to UV rays.
- By comparison, fewer respondents link eye diseases such as [cataracts](#) (24 percent), eye cancer (24 percent), [macular degeneration](#) (19 percent); and [glaucoma \(17 percent\) to overexposure to solar rays.](#) (17 percent) to overexposure to solar rays.
- 67 percent of parents purchase sunglasses for their children; however, 13 percent of parents do not check to make sure the glasses protect against UV rays.

For additional information on UV protection, please visit: <http://www.aoa.org/x4735.xml>. Or to view a copy of the AOA's Shopping Guide for Sunglasses, please visit: <http://aoa.org/documents/SunglassShoppingGuide0810.pdf>.

About the survey:

The third annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 17-19, 2008, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,001 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

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