UnitedHealthcare Vision

Don’t Forget Your Shades

We all know the risks of spending too much time in the sun; sunburn, permanent skin damage, premature aging, and increased risk of cancer. But did you know that UV light can also damage your eyes?

Just like our skin, our eyes are susceptible to both UV-A and UV-B rays. UV-A rays can hurt your central vision by damaging the macula (a part of the retina at the back of your eye) which can lead to Macular Degeneration. UV-B rays can cause more immediate damage than UV-A, and have been linked to long term problems (or issues) such as cataracts.

Exposure to intense UV rays, even for a short time, especially when around water or snow, can lead to photokeratitis, or "sunburn" of the eye. With photokeratitis, you may experience the following symptoms:

- Red eyes
- A gritty feeling or a sensation that there is something in your eye
- Sensitivity to light
- Tearing
- Hazy vision
- Temporary loss of vision

If you believe you have photokeratisis, you should visit your eye doctor for an evaluation and treatment of the problem. The discomfort and symptoms are temporary, usually lasting from 12 to 48 hours.

Sunglasses aren't just an adult fashion statement; children should also wear sunglasses regularly. Since children's eyes let in more light, they are at risk for greater exposure to UV than adults, whose eyes naturally filter some light out. Just as you wouldn't forget your children's sunscreen, don't forget their sunglasses!

UnitedHealthcare Vision℠

Here are some helpful suggestions for choosing sunglasses:

- Check to make sure the sunglasses fit well and are not damaged,
- Choose sunglasses that fit your lifestyle - appropriate darkness for highly sunny conditions and polarized lenses for those who participate in out door sports and activities,
- Lenses should be impact resistant and should not pop out of the frames,
- Choose lenses that are large enough to shield the eyes from most angles. Wrap around glasses provide extra protection.
- It is important to wear sunglasses even if it is not bright outside because UV rays can penetrate clouds and fog.
- On sunny days, wearing a wide-brimmed hat along with sunglasses will provide additional protection. Wearing a hat can cut in half the amount of UV rays that reach the eyes,
- Buy your sunglasses from a reputable company to ensure you are getting full UV protection. Your eye care provider can test the amount of UV that is blocked by your sunglasses, so when in doubt, have them checked out.

Lens Options

- As an alternative to sunglasses, there are special lenses for your every day eyeglasses called photochromic lenses, sometimes referred to as Transitions. These lenses automatically darken in proportion to the UV light. If you are in the sun, photochromics darken, if indoors, the lenses lighten. Photochromic lenses also provide 100% UV protection.
- You can also inquire with your provider if magnetic or clip-on sunglasses are available for your eyeglasses.
- And finally, polarized lenses enhance visibility and reduce glare by reducing the light reflected off of horizontal surfaces. Polarized sunglasses are very popular for people who participate in outdoor sports, fishing, boating, and driving long distances.

The damage that UV radiation can cause to the eyes should be taken seriously. Visiting your optometrist or ophthalmologist regularly is the simplest step you can take to care for your eyes. During your next eye exam discuss the types of lenses that are available and the importance of UV protections with your eye care provider.

You should choose sunglasses that:

- reduce glare,
- are clearly labeled to block 99 to 100% of UV-A and UV-B rays,
- protect your eyes,
- are comfortable to wear,
- do not distort colors.

Sources:
www.preventblindness.com
www.health.com
Friedman, Dr. Alan, Vision Director for OptumHealth Vision,Ultraviolet Radiation and Your Eyes, May 2009.

UnitedHealthcare Vision℠

06/09-UV Awareness