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YOUR EYES CAN GET SUNBURNED TOO

Burns to the Surface of the Cornea Are Surprisingly Common...and Painful

MADISON, WI – With the onset of the spring and summer months, many Wisconsinites will be heading outdoors to soak up the sun. While most individuals are aware of the importance of sunscreen to prevent sunburn and related long-term damage to the skin, the need to protect your eyes from sunburn is lesser known. UV radiation, which comes from the sun (and from tanning beds), can cause significant harm to your eyes. According to the American Optometric Association's (AOA) Tenth Annual American Eye-Q® survey, nearly half of all consumers do not check the UV protection level before purchasing sunglasses.

"The harmful effects of long-term exposure to UV rays are a real concern because they can cause serious damage to the eye, possibly resulting in cataracts, age-related macular degeneration, or abnormal growths on the eye," explains 2019 Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) President and La Crosse, WI area optometrist Dr. Ann Wonderling.

Short-term exposure to UV rays is something to watch as well. If the eyes are unprotected and exposed to excessive amounts of UV radiation over a short period of time (even for just a few hours), individuals may experience an effect called photokeratitis, also known as 'sunburn of the eye.' "Photokeratitis may be painful and include symptoms such as red eyes, a foreign-body sensation or gritty feeling in the eyes, extreme sensitivity to light, and excessive tearing," advises Dr. Wonderling. See your eye doctor, if you exhibit symptoms of photokeratitis.

Children's Eyes Are Especially in Need of UV Protection

Unlike the mature lens found in an adult eye, a child's lens cannot filter out UV rays as easily, causing damage to the child's retina. When children play outside, they are often excited and may not remember to put on sunglasses. Parents can help their children establish this good habit for life by reminding them to wear their sunglasses. "Exposure to UV rays can cause problems for people of all ages, but it is critical for children to protect their eyes since their lenses are more transparent than an adult's. By learning to protect their eyes early, children can avoid unnecessary UV damage," recommends Dr. Wonderling.

What to Look for When Purchasing Sunglasses

Although it can be tempting to purchase sunglasses purely for fashion, the WOA also recommends consumers look for the following in their lenses for optimal eye protection from UV rays:

- Lenses that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays. While some contact lenses also offer UV protection, these should be worn with sunglasses to maximize protection.
- Sunglasses should screen out 75 to 90 percent of visible light.
- Lenses that have a uniform tint i.e. are not darker in one area as opposed to another. The WOA suggests a gray tint, which is particularly helpful when driving as it offers the best color recognition.
- Pick lenses that are perfectly matched in color and are free of distortion and imperfections.
- Choose a frame that fits close to the eyes and contours to the shape of the face, to prevent UV exposure from all angles.

The best way to monitor eye health, maintain good vision, and keep up-to-date on the latest in UV protection is by scheduling yearly comprehensive eye exams with your optometrist. To find an optometrist in your area, please visit <http://www.woa-eyes.org/members>.

About the American Eye-Q® survey

The 10th annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From February 19-March 4, 2015, PSB conducted 1,000 online interviews among Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of the U.S. general population (margin of error is plus or minus 3.10 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level).

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.