

AN EYE OPENER: OVEREXPOSURE TO UV RAYS CAN LEAD TO EYE DISEASES

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) encourages simple eye care precautions during sun exposure

MADISON, WI – As we get closer to the summer months, it is crucial to remember the importance of eye care protection and precautions when it comes to exposure to UV rays. Overexposure to UV rays, especially during the warmer months of the year, can be harmful to eyes and eye health. The member doctors of the **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** recommend simple eye care precautions during sun exposure in order to prevent eye health diseases and protect your vision.

“Overexposure of the eyes to UV can be considered a risk factor for cataracts, macular degeneration, and skin cancer on the eyelids,” reports current WOA President and Wausau Optometrist Dr. Jeff Sarazen. “When searching for proper sun protection, you should always look for sunglasses that offer good protection, blocking 99 to 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B radiation and screening out 75 to 90 percent of visible light.”

Whether it's cloudy or sunny, summer or winter, the member doctors of the Wisconsin Optometric Association urge everyone to take the necessary steps to protect their eyes from the sun's UV rays. According to Dr. Sarazen, “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 even blindness.”

Protection from harmful UV rays is even more important for children, who, with spending more time outdoors during the warmer months, are at greater risk for overexposure to UV rays. “The lenses of a child's eyes are more transparent than those of adults, allowing shorter wavelength light to reach the retina,” advises Dr. Sarazen. “Because the effects of solar radiation are cumulative, it's important to develop good eye protection habits early in life as young children and teenagers.”

Members of Generation X, born 1965-1977, may have their eye on the ball more than others concerning the importance of protection from UV rays. According to the American Optometric Association's Sixth Annual American Eye-Q® survey, Generation X members are the most likely to choose sunglasses based on the level of UV protection over other factors such as cost and name brand association.

The following tips from the WOA may help prevent eye and vision damage from overexposure 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 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 evenly colored 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. Brown or amber-colored lenses may be better for those who are visually impaired because they increase contrast as well as reduce light intensity.
5. Don't forget sun protection for young children and teenagers, who typically spend more time in the sun than adults and are at a greater risk for eye damage.

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 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 650 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed and certified to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. The WOA also maintains an affiliation with the American Optometric Association (AOA). For more information, visit WOA's Web site at www.woa-eyes.org.