



Uneasy on the Eyes

More women are getting scorched by a type of sun damage that SPF can't prevent. Learn how to shield your sight from an overlooked threat.

By Jamie Hergenrader

Hands. Feet. Back of the ears. Yes, you've got these high-risk burn sites covered. But even if you have a master's in suncreening, you're still missing a spot. Fewer than 10 percent of people realize it's critical to safeguard their eyes. "That whole area is vulnerable to UV rays," says Anne Summers, M.D., of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. "We're seeing more cases of eye sunburn, more people with damage to the whites of the eyes, and more cancers in and around the eye." The statistics are alarming.

Healthy Dose

Seriously alarming. The American Cancer Society predicts 2,580 new cases of ocular cancer this year, most of them deadly melanomas that some research links to hefty sun exposure. And 24 million people—more than 60 percent of them women—will end up with sight-stealing conditions like cataracts, which can be fueled by the UV damage you're getting now.

But here's the bright side: There's plenty you can do to buffer your eyes from short- and long-term ailments. Your vision protection plan starts with knowing what you're up against—then learning to help block rays like a champ.

Light Blights

At less than one square inch each, your eyes take up a tiny amount of real estate—yet they help steer your every move. They can also take a solar-powered beating in the form of...

> **Pinguecula.** There's no fix for these permanent yellowish deposits on the whites of the eyes. People who spend lots of time at high altitudes or on the open water, where sun tends to be strongest, are at greater risk for the harmless (if cosmetically undesirable) patches.

> **Photokeratitis.** A.k.a. a scorched cornea, a.k.a. sunburn. Your eyeball's outer layer soaks up 99 percent of UV rays and can burn in as little as an hour of unprotected exposure. You won't feel it in real time, but hours later, signs can range from irritation or dryness to intense redness, swelling, pain, or even temporary blindness. Mild cases clear up on their own, but you'll need to see an M.D. for symptoms that last longer than 24 hours.

> **Cataracts.** Sun isn't solely to blame for these lens growths, but it can sure speed them up. Consistent UV damage could spell the difference between cloudy vision in your forties versus sixties.



VISION NUTRITION

Feast your eyes on this: Two primo nutrients, lutein and zeaxanthin, can help filter UV rays, counteract sun damage, and ward off cataracts and macular degeneration. Swallow their sight-defending effects in just half a cup of spinach or kale per day. Other good sources include collards, corn, broccoli, romaine lettuce, and green beans.

> Macular degeneration.

Prolonged sun exposure can exacerbate the retina injuries that cause this condition, which can lead to blindness.

> **Cancer.** Too much sun time can up your risk for not only ocular melanoma but also malignancies around the eyes. In fact, up to 10 percent of all skin cancers occur on the eyelids. Warding them off in the first place is key, since such cancers can burrow deep into the eye socket—even the brain.

See No Evil

Deep breath. Your chances of dealing with any of these conditions plummet if you follow a few simple rules.

> **Wear sunglasses.** Rain or shine. Pick pairs with UV 400 or 100 percent UV blocking on the label. (Ignore specs that tout a UVC rating; the atmosphere absorbs C rays before they can infiltrate your eyes.) Lens color and darkness are purely style choices, and "polarized" is an anti-glare perk, not a health must. Don't skip shades just because your contact lenses have UV protection; those guard only a small portion of your eyes, says Ivan Schwab, M.D., a professor of ophthalmology at UC Davis.

> **Add a hat.** A three-inch brim can help block damaging UV rays from your eye area.

> **Watch the clock.** Sunlight is most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., whether you're in town (rays can reflect off pavement) or at the beach (ditto with sand and water).

> **Check your meds.** Certain antibiotics and birth-control pills can make your eyes very sensitive to sun, prompting them to burn in less time at lower levels of exposure.

If you take these meds, talk to your doc to see if they put you at risk, and double your commitment to the first three steps to stay safe. ■



Buy 'Em While It's Hot!

Women's Health and Steven Alan Optical teamed up to create these exclusive, limited-edition sunglasses (our logos are etched—tastefully!—in gold on the inside of one arm). Shelling out for them means protecting yourself and others: **Steven Alan Optical will donate 100 percent of the net proceeds to Eye Care America**, a public service program that provides eye care at no out-of-pocket cost to medically underserved seniors who qualify. Score a pair before they sell out at select Steven Alan stores and stevenalanoptical.com.

THROWIN' SHADE

Sunnies for every sitch.



The Coveralls

Very little sunlight sneaks through these large lenses, which shield everything from cheekbone to brow. *H&M, \$10, hm.com*



The Pool Guard

Wearing shades while wading is a must. This polarized pick minimizes reflective glare. *Sperry Seabrook, \$95, sperry.com*



The Biking Buddy

The sides of these no-budge glasses are compact enough to fit under a helmet. You can also take them out for a run. *Oakley Be Unstoppable, \$200, sunglassesshut.com*

The All-Stars

Chic enough to make a fashion statement, comfy enough for dawn-to-dusk use. *Steven Alan x Women's Health Agnes, \$195, stevenalanoptical.com*

Share a selfie of your most stylish frames on Instagram or Twitter, using the hashtag **#WHEasyOnTheEyes**. We may re-post it on WomensHealthMag.com!