

Health

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Health tips: Ways to protect your eyes from the sun when you step out in summer

As you prepare to step outside this summer, don't forget this health plan by doctors for keeping your eyes happy as well and use these sun protection tips to avoid preventable damage to your eyesight.



Health tips: Ways to protect your eyes from the sun when you step out in summer (Saliha)

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Taking care of your eyes in the summer is just as important as it is the rest of the year but though the majority of people know how the sun can affect and harm their skin in summer season, many summer revellers are unaware of (or choose to ignore) the effect the sun can have on their eyes. For the uninitiated, UVA and UVB rays are the two types of rays from which you must protect yourself and health experts point out that the UVA rays are more pervasive and penetrate deeper than UVB rays.

These rays have an effect on your central vision and can cause damage to the macula, which is a part of your retina in the back of your eye and UVB rays are best known for their role in sunburn and skin reddening but they can also harm your eyes and have been shown to cause more vision damage than UVA rays. Hence, to avoid corneal damage, it is critical to protect your eyes from UVB rays as exposure to harmful radiation can cause a variety of eye problems like macular degeneration, cataracts, Pterygium, cancer of the eyelids or corneal sunburn [snow blindness], depending on the frequency and intensity of your exposure, as well as the methods you use to protect your eyes.

Since our eyesight is likely one of our most important senses, it is critical that we learn proper summer eye care and protect our eyes whenever we are outside in the sun. In an interview with HT Lifestyle, Dr Vidya Nair Chaudhry, Senior Consultant, Ophthalmology and Refractive Surgery at Aakash Healthcare in Delhi's Dwarka, advised, "You should still adhere to the same eye care guidelines, such as washing your hands before handling contact lenses and wearing the appropriate eyewear when participating in certain sports and activities. Even when it's cloudy outside, wearing sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection is essential."

She added, "Even if your contact lenses have UV protection built-in, sunglasses are still recommended because they protect the surrounding eye area and act as a barrier between your eyes and the summer heat, preventing dry eye. Dehydration is more likely to occur during the summer months, affecting your body's ability to produce tears. This can cause dry eyes, so it's critical to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. It is a good idea to maintain the humidity of the room you are in if you have dry eye. While it's impossible to avoid all allergens, especially those found outside, you can limit your exposure and protect your eyes from allergic reactions by taking precautions. Practicing both Wearing sunglasses and washing your face as soon as you come in from outside can both help."

Dr Danish Iqbal, Senior Consultant at Sharp Sight Eye Hospital recommended a plan for keeping our eyes happy as we prepare to step outside this summer and suggested using these sun protection tips to avoid preventable damage to our eyesight:

- 1. Wear sunglasses** - While classy summer shades are a favoured accessory for many, don't just go for style when investing in sunglasses. Rather, opt for a larger style with a bit of wrap around to avoid rays penetrating your eyes from the side. If you need help protecting your eyes from the sun, ask your ophthalmologist for recommendations or have them take a look at your shades.
- 2. Avoid peak hours** - If at all possible, avoid sun exposure between 10 AM and 4 PM to protect your eyes from the most aggressive Ultraviolet (UV) radiation.
- 3. Stay hydrated** - In summer, it's easier to become dehydrated, which can affect your eyes. Serious dehydration makes it harder for the body to produce tears, leading to 'dry eye' and other vision related problems. So drink a lots of water each day apart from all the other health benefits, it provides the necessary fluid for normal eye function.
- 4. Use sunscreen** - Excess exposure to the sun is one of the main risk factors for developing skin cancer. Skin cancer can occur anywhere on your body, including your eyelids and the skin around your eyes. Look for a sunscreen with at least a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15 for your face and reapply it every two hours.
- 5. Wear a wide-brimmed hat** - A wide-brimmed hat provides additional protection from the sun. It is helpful if you will be spending time outside where shade is not available.

Elaborating upon these sun protection tips for the eyes, Dr Neeraj Sanduja, MBBS, MS - Ophthalmology, Ophthalmologist, Eye Surgeon, highlighted:

1. Choose your sunglasses with caution - When purchasing sunglasses, don't just go for looks. Rather, look for a pair that says "100% UV protection" or "UV400" to ensure you're getting the right kind of protection. Similarly, choose a larger style with some wrap-around to prevent rays from penetrating your eyes from the side.

2. Wear a hat as well as sunglasses - Wear a wide-brimmed hat to protect your eyes in addition to sunglasses with adequate UV protection. A hat will protect you from roughly half of the UV rays you are exposed to. This shield also protects you from rays that may penetrate above or around your sunglasses.

3. Avoid peak hours - While most people enjoy soaking up the sun's rays during the day, this is also the time of day when the sun can be the most harmful. Avoid sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. if at all possible to protect your eyes from the most harmful UV rays. If you must be out in the middle of the day, always wear protective clothing.

4. Never look at the sun directly - Looking directly at the sun, even with protective eyewear, can cause significant damage to your eyesight. Retinopathy, a type of retina damage caused by solar radiation, is the most common type of damage caused by direct sun contact.

To avoid overexposure to very bright light, keep an eye on factors such as cloud cover, altitude, reflection, and time of day.