

Summer School for Your Eyes

Summer Eye Safety

Finally, summer is approaching. And nothing could be more welcomed at this time than some bright sunshine, warm weather, and any excuse in the world to head outside. Even if you're taking care this summer to continually prevent the spread of COVID-19, there are a few things you can also do to protect your eye health while enjoying all your favorite outdoor summer activities.

Protecting Your Eyes from the Ill Effects of Ultraviolet (UV) Rays

We all know that sunshine, although very healthy in small doses, becomes damaging to our bodies with extended exposure. You understand UV rays harm your skin and increase your chances of developing skin cancer, but were you also aware that they can likewise cause eye problems over time? It's true. Too much sun sometimes leads to a condition known as "[photokeratitis](#)," where the surface of your eyes becomes burned by UV rays. This results in blurred vision, stinging sensations, redness, and sometimes even [temporary vision loss](#).

Additionally, long-term sun exposure around your eyes will increase your chances of certain types of skin cancers on your eyelids. The most common skin cancers that occur on the eyelid are [more likely spread to your eyes](#) and other parts of your face, than if the same cancer occurred on other parts of your body. This can put you at a risk for permanent vision problems or facial disfigurement.



So, in the same way you protect your skin with sunscreen and seek out shade from trees and awnings, it's just as important to take steps to protect your eyes this summer. You can start by wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sporting wrap-around sunglasses with full UV spectrum protection.

A wide-brimmed hat will physically block the sunlight from reaching your eyes and face, reducing your chances of overexposure. But if you're not comfortable wearing hats, then carrying an umbrella with you while you're outdoors is another suitable option. This especially applies if other sources of shade are not readily available.

Although physically blocking sunlight is an excellent method to protect your eye health, the sun also has a way of getting around this. When sunlight reflects off surfaces like water, sand, and concrete sidewalks, it can reach your face from any angle imaginable. That means your overhead protection needs to be reinforced with wrap-around sunglasses. When purchasing, be sure to take specs with 100% protection from both UV-A and UV-B radiation. This is sometimes marked and confirmed with a "UV 400" label.

Eye Safety During Outdoor Sports, Chores and Projects

The weather's nice. Not only are you going outside more often to relax in the sun, barbecue with family, and squeeze in a walk or two, but you're also tending to the lawn, gearing up for this year's DIY home improvement projects, and headed to hit pop-flies or shoot hoops with your kids.

Many outdoor activities present dangers to our eyes, even when the risks seem low. In fact, [more than half of all eye injuries occur at home](#), with most being 100% avoidable. If you find yourself undertaking projects or activities that involve projectiles (ball sports, stones thrown up by a weed whacker or mower, etc.), sharp objects and powerful tools (e.g., personal workshop or [occupational hazards](#)), or even concentrated chemicals (e.g. pool chemicals or weed sprays), then always be sure to wear the appropriate safety glasses or goggles.

Safety glasses should wrap around the face and be impact resistant. Oftentimes, these frames are inexpensive at home improvement stores and are made from polycarbonate plastics that do not shatter. If you are exposed to chemical fumes—for example, if you have a pool that you treat with chemicals—be sure to use appropriate safety goggles carefully selected with the proper safety standards.

Preventing Summer-Related Dry Eye and Swimmer’s Eye

When taking a plunge in the pool as the weather starts to heat up, be sure to wear swim goggles or avoid opening your eyes underwater. The chlorine, as well as other chemicals used to keep the water clean, can cause short-term irritation of your eyes, known to some as “swimmer’s eye.” The symptoms include blurry vision, redness, and sometimes even a painful stinging feeling. Pool water and bodies of freshwater (don’t let the term fool you), like rivers, lakes, and streams, can also harbor bacteria that might increase your risk of infection when opening your eyes underwater. And if you wear contacts, [it’s recommended to take them out](#) before diving in. Or, in cases where that isn’t possible, to use swim goggles and discard contact lenses after to prevent infections and other eye problems.

Another common eye problem during summer is dry eye. Dry eye occurs with extended exposure to dry, warm environments, and lots of wind. So, if you live in a hot, arid climate or you’re spending a lot of time in the car riding with the windows or top down, then this might become an issue. Some of the easiest ways to prevent dry eye from happening are by staying hydrated, blinking more frequently (especially while looking at screens for extended periods), and covering your eyes from wind exposure with a good pair of sunglasses. If irritation persists, then consider purchasing some over-the-counter saline eye drops or scheduling an appointment with your eye doctor.

As Always, Get Your Annual Comprehensive Eye Exam

Your eyes and vision are constantly changing. They must adjust and adapt to new circumstances and environments endlessly. Summer is no exception to this and brings with it a whole new wave of changes that can be hard on your eye health. While the ailments described in this article are preventable by taking the proper measures to avoid them, there are others that you might not yet be aware of. Having the opportunity to consult with an eye doctor is invaluable in caring for your eyes this summer. He or she will give you a comprehensive eye exam to identify any potential eye problems, and then take the time to discuss solutions and answer all your questions. And with VSP, receiving an eye exam once per year is covered by your plan.

Information received through VSP Vision Care channels is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice, medical recommendations, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your eye doctor, physician, or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.