

FENDING OFF UV LIGHT

Why hiding behind your shades is good ■ Why overtime is bad ■ Taking women's work for granted



It's not just your skin that's at risk of burning from ultraviolet light (UV) this summer. UV light, especially reflected light from water, sand, pavement or, for that matter, snow, can also cause eye burn. Repeated often enough over a period of years, eye burns can permanently damage the eye's lens and retina.

There are other risks to the eye from exposure to UV light, including

- macular degeneration, which can lead to loss of central vision

- pterygium, a growth that invades the corner of the eyes, and
- cataracts, a clouding of the eye's lens.

We usually associate cataracts with elderly people who have had a lifetime of exposure to UV rays. But cataracts can now be found in much younger people, due to Earth's depleted ozone layer and a consequent increase in the amount of UV light to which we are exposed.

Particularly at risk for all of these eye ailments are those who work outdoors, summer and winter. What's the best prevention tool? Sunglasses. When properly chosen, sunglasses will protect your eyes against damage from the two types of UV light — UV-A and UV-B — implicated in the development of eye disease. Here's some advice from the

Canadian Ophthalmological Society on how to choose sunglasses:

Check the label on sunglasses for the level of UV protection. Your best choices are sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of UV light. A couple of warnings.

- 1) Don't rely on price or lens colour for protection. Expensive sun-glasses or those with dark lenses don't necessarily provide good UV light protection.
- 2) Sunglasses with the highest degree of protection may be unsuitable for driving. Health Canada suggests that general purpose sunglasses, which block from 60 to 92 percent of visible light and UV-A rays and between 95 and 99 percent of UV-B rays, are best for driving.

If you spend a lot of time outdoors, wear wraparound glasses or sunglasses with side shields to prevent sunlight from entering your eyes from the sides.

Sources: www.canadian-health-network.ca; www.healthcanada.ca.