

UV Awareness

Protecting your eyes from the sun

When you think of sun protection, you probably associate it with slathering on sunscreen during summer days, but harmful effects of ultraviolet (UV) rays occur year round and are just as damaging to your eyes. Alarmingly, while 82 percent of Americans know that sun exposure can cause skin cancer, only 9 percent know that sun can harm the eyes, according to a study sponsored by Transitions® Optical, Inc.

There are two different types of UV rays. UVA rays can damage part of the retina at the back of your eye, called the macula, and UVB rays can damage the cornea and lens. Cumulative damage from UV rays can lead to a number of short- and long-term sight-stealing eye diseases including:

- ▶ **Cataract** — a clouding of the eye's lens that can cause blurred vision. More than 20 million Americans have a cataract.¹
- ▶ **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)** — a deterioration of the macula, which leads to blurred, distorted vision and blind spots. Roughly 1.8 million Americans 40 years and older have advanced AMD. Some 7.3 million people with intermediate AMD are at risk for vision loss.²
- ▶ **Diabetic retinopathy** — the most common diabetic eye disease and a leading cause of blindness in American adults. It is caused by changes in the blood vessels of the retina.
- ▶ **Pterygium** — a growth in the corner of the eye that is usually non-cancerous, but that can block vision and grow over the cornea.
- ▶ **Skin cancer around the eyelid** — appears most commonly on the lower lid but can occur anywhere around the eye.
- ▶ **Photokeratitis** — essentially a "sunburn" of the eye surface. The effect is temporary, but painful as eyes appear red, teary and become sensitive to light.

Plus, glare from everyday bright light can decrease contrast, making it difficult to see objects clearly, and cause eyestrain and fatigue.

Protect your eyes from UV and glare with these simple steps:

- ▶ **Wear sunglasses** that block 100 percent of UV rays, even on cloudy days.
- ▶ If you wear a prescription, **Transitions® lenses** are a good everyday option. They are as clear as ordinary lenses indoors, but turn sunglasses dark outdoors depending on the intensity of UV rays — reducing glare and making the eyes more comfortable. They also block 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays.
- ▶ Choose **bigger lenses** to shield more of your eyes, and wear a wide-brimmed hat to block UV rays from the top and sides of your face.
- ▶ If you wear **contact lenses**, get ones that filter out a lot of UV, but remember that they do not protect the area around the eyes.

Don't forget the importance of your annual eye exam.

Also be sure to schedule a comprehensive eye exam with your eyecare professional regularly. These exams could provide early detection of eye diseases and other systemic diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and even cancer.

Do you have vision coverage from Anthem? If so, don't forget that in addition to a comprehensive eye exam, you may also have coverage for a wide selection of frames as well as discounts on higher performing lens options. Don't have vision coverage? Be sure to ask your employer how you can get access to great vision coverage from Anthem.

Source:

- (1) The National Eye Institute, 2009
- (2) The Facts on Macular Degeneration, American Health Assistance Foundation (<http://www.ahaf.org>), 2009

