



ChallengeME MONTHLY MINUTE

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Monthly topic: **Sun & Your Eyes**

Protecting your eyes from sun damage

While sunglasses are definitely a good idea when it comes to eye protection, not all sunglasses are created equal. Choose sunglasses that limit transmission to no more than 1 percent UVB and 1 percent UVA rays. Sometimes the information on the glasses indicates that 99 percent of the UV rays are blocked. That's OK.

Other things to look for:

Wrap-around sunglasses or lenses large enough to completely cover the eye and prevent as much light as possible from entering through the edges of the glasses are best. Darker lenses can be helpful, particularly if you are more light-sensitive. Gray lenses provide the least color distortion but do not offer any better protection than other colored lenses. While most sunglasses can help block UV rays from entering through the lenses, most frame styles do not prevent rays from reaching the sides, top and bottom of the glasses. While UV-blocking contact lenses provide important added protection for wearers, they should not be viewed as a stand-alone solution. Contact lenses should always be worn in conjunction with high-quality UV-blocking sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat.

The sun can damage your eyes, even if you don't realize it.

Fortunately, not all sun-related eye conditions are permanent. For example, did you know that your eyes can get sunburned? Technically, your corneas suffer sun damage through a condition called photokeratitis. It's also known as welder's flash, snow blindness and arc eye, though you don't have to be around welding or snow to get it. Here are some other eye conditions that can result from ultraviolet (UV) exposure:

- Cataracts
- Macular degeneration
- Pingueculae
- Pterygia

The sun is a life-giving force, so how can it be so damaging?

ABCs of Ultraviolet Radiation

There are three ranges of UV radiation: UVC, UVB and UVA. The most damaging form is UVC, but luckily, it's absorbed by the earth's atmosphere and doesn't reach us. Exposure to UVB rays is closely linked with photokeratitis (a kind of sunburn of the cornea), cataracts, pterygium (a white or creamy fleshy growth on the surface of the eye) and a form of eye cancer called squamous cell carcinoma of the conjunctiva (a rare tumor of the surface of the eye). Although laboratory studies find exposure to UVA rays can damage the retina (the light-sensitive membrane that covers the back of the eye), very little UVA reaches your retina because most is absorbed by other parts of the eye.

Unexpected Sources of Ultraviolet Radiation

Although direct sunlight from the sun itself is extremely damaging to the eyes, reflected UV rays can be even more dangerous. For example:

- Grass, soil, and water reflect less than 10 percent of UV radiation.
- Fresh snow reflects as much as 80 percent of UV radiation.
- Dry sand reflects about 15 percent of UV radiation. Sea foam reflects about 25 percent.

Be sure to visit the ChallengeME website:

- Sign up for Health Coaching: Call: TTY: 800.697.0353
Online: guidanceresources.com
- Listen to the ChallengeME Podcasts

New! Health Plan Updates Eff.: July 1, 2022

- Go to: <https://www.maine.gov/bhr/oe>

For more Wellness Information:

- <http://maine.gov/mdot/challengeme>

ChallengeME
MaineDOT Healthy Workforce

Coming up August: 5-a-Day

Comments, questions, ideas, or submissions?
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