

Are you protected?

Local Optometrists say sunscreen is not enough to keep harmful rays at bay

These days, you wouldn't dream of spending a few hours under Florida's hot sun without slathering yourself and your children in sunscreen. You know that UV rays pose serious threats to anyone who spends prolonged periods in the sun, whether you are participating in outdoor sports, or simply enjoying a day at the beach. You wear sunscreen because the dangers of sun damage and skin cancer are not worth the risk.

"What you may not know, but what is equally important, are the risks associated with sun damage and your eyes," says Dr. Nicole Linsey Parsons, O.D. She and her husband, Brent, own and operate Linsey Eyecare in Port Richey. "The affects on your eyes from UV rays are cumulative over your lifetime, and long term exposure is linked to conditions such as cataracts and retinal damage, both of which can critically impair vision. *Rarely is it possible to reverse either of these conditions.*"

Prolonged exposure to UV rays can lead to macular degeneration, which is the leading cause of vision loss for older Americans. Other hazards include corneal sunburn, growths on the whites of your eyes that may involve the cornea, and skin cancer around the eyelids.

This damage can be prevented by wearing glasses with lenses that provide at least 99% UV protection. Because UV damage is cumulative, it is important to protect your eyes every day, in all light conditions. "Children are especially susceptible to sun damage of the eye because they spend so much time outside, and their eyes do not block as much UV radiation as adults' eyes do. And yet, children are two times more likely to wear sunscreen than they are sunglasses," says Dr. Parsons.

Still not paying attention? Consider this: Eyesight is one of your most important senses. Most of what you learn about the world around you comes from what your eyes take in. Your most vivid, colorful memories and lessons in life are depicted by what you see. Read on.....

Sun damage is not the only thing you have to worry about affecting your eyes. As our society has become more health conscious, Americans both young and old have become increasingly

active in outdoor sports. Along with this comes a higher risk of eye injury on top of UV exposure. Each year, 38,000 eye injuries occur during sports-related events. The leading cause of vision loss in one eye is by injury, and 27% of these injuries occur while playing sports. A few of the more severe eye injuries that can occur while playing sports include: an inflamed iris, swollen retina, traumatic cataract, and fracture of the eye socket.

The solution to protecting your eyes from both UV rays and injury is choosing the right sunwear. Bear in mind that you are looking for a versatile piece of eyewear that not only protects your eyes from the sun's rays, but features durable lenses fit for your activity, as well as the correct components to keep them on your head.

People who participate in outdoor activities any time of year understand that quality of vision is vital in regards to performing safely, and being able to perform at the top of their game without the glare of sun in their eyes. Lenses made of polycarbonate or Trivex are a great choice. Not only are they UV-absorbing, these lenses are highly impact resistant and are arguably the most critical choice of lens for outdoor sports of the rough and tough sort. They also come in an array of colors that enhance visual precision during different activities.

For years, gray absorptive lenses have been the preferred lens of outdoor enthusiasts because they darken (without altering) what the wearer sees. These are still the lens of choice for boaters, walkers and basketball players. However, additional lens colors have been developed to aid visual clarity in other sports. For instance, many golfers wear brownish-rose or green lenses to assist in color clarity. Cyclists prefer yellow or vermilion lenses in low light, and some use blue or brown/amber to increase color contrast. Blue, orange or brown absorptive lenses are preferred by tennis players who need to track that yellow ball.

Finally, consider your hardware to be just as important. Sunwear manufacturers have advanced significantly to meet growing demands of the athletically inclined. The resulting technology includes lightweight, flexible but durable glasses with no-slip components, such as retainers that wrap around the head, no-slip temple grips and nose pads, often made of rubber, that will not let you down no matter how rough and tough your play. Whether you are looking for fashionable eyewear, functional or a combination of both, there are selections available like never before.

“No matter what sport you participate in, or how much time you spend outdoors, it is important to work closely with your eye care professional in determining what’s best for you,” says Dr. Parsons. Linsey Eyecare has 25 years of experience in the Port Richey area, and can assist you with the most unique visual needs, from long-term health preventatives as well as eye protection for real-life conditions that are easily incorporated into your lifestyle!