



GLOBE

healthreport

WARNING!

PROTECTING the skin from the sun has become common, but experts now warn that your eyes can also be severely injured by the powerful and harmful rays.

“Most people are not aware that long-term exposure to sunlight, with its ultraviolet wavelengths, can be very damaging to the eyes,” says Dr. Lee Duffner, a Hollywood, Fla., ophthalmologist and spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

In fact, the eye health group Prevent Blindness America says exposure over the years to UV rays can cause “significant and lasting damage to the eye and vision.”

Over-exposure to sunlight has been linked to eye cancer.

The dangers also include:

- **Cataracts**, a clouding of the eye’s lens that affects one in six Americans older than age 40 and more than half of people older than age 80. Sun exposure is responsible for 20 percent of cataract cases.

- **Macular degeneration**, or damage to the retina that destroys sharp central vision, is the leading cause of blindness in America.

- **Pterygium**, a growth of tissue over the white part of the eye that leads to astigmatism. If it



SUMMER SUN IS BAD FOR EYES

UV light can damage vision

grows over the cornea, it can blur or obstruct vision and may need to be removed.

Even short exposure can re-

sult in photokeratitis – a painful sunburn causing blurred vision and even temporary blindness.

But Dr. Cary Silverman, a

New Jersey-based ophthalmologist with EyeCare 20/20, tells GLOBE proper sunglasses – that cover the entire eye area including eyelids – can prevent damage.

“Wear sunglasses that block out 99 to 100 percent of UV rays – not just tinted lenses,” he says. “Make sure the labels clearly state that the lenses block the more harmful UVA as well as UVB rays.”

He also warns that UV-absorbing contact lenses don’t offer adequate protection and do not replace sunglasses.

“The glasses should also be close fitting to prevent UV rays from filtering in,” he adds. “Look for the larger, wrap-around glasses for maximum protection.”

“Don’t be fooled by price. The more expensive glasses are more fashionable, not necessarily more functional.”

He also suggests applying sunscreen around the delicate eye area for extra protection and wearing wide-brimmed hats.

And exposure should be minimal between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun’s UV rays are most intense.

Adds the expert, “Get in the habit of putting your sunglasses on whenever you are in the sun.”

- LYNN ALLISON

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Update

Olive oil lowers stroke risk

➤ **OLDER** folks who use olive oil in their cooking and on their salads are less likely to suffer a stroke. A study in the journal, *Neurology*, found that olive oil reduced the risk of having a stroke by a whopping 41 percent. “It has long been known to have potential health benefits, such as protecting against high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart disease,” says Dr. Sharlin Ahmed of The Stroke Association.

Gray hair could be thing of past

➤ **GOOD** news for silver foxes! Scientists at New York University have identified the proteins that cause gray hair, which could lead to an eventual cure. Writing in the journal, *Cell*, researchers reveal that they had isolated the protein found to be vital to the production of colors in hairs. The breakthrough raises the prospects of shampoos, lotions or drugs that increase levels of the protein and restore hair to its natural color.

Living with pets prevents allergies

➤ **INFANTS** who share a home with a cat or dog are less likely to develop allergies, say scientists - but only if the child is exposed to the animal while still a baby. A report in the journal, *Clinical & Experimental Allergy*, suggests early exposure to pet allergies and pet-related bacteria strengthens the immune system. “Dirt is good,” says researcher Ganesa Wengienka. “Your immune system, if it’s busy with exposures early on, stays away from the allergic immune profile.”