

SunSmart Eyes

Key points

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation can damage your eyes, as well as your skin. To protect your eyes:

- Wear close-fitting and wrap-around sunglasses.
- Always check the tag to make sure that they meet the Australian Standard 1067 and have an eye protection factor (EPF) of 10.
- Wear a hat. A SunSmart hat – broad-brimmed, legionnaire or bucket style – will shade your eyes and reduce the amount of UV radiation that reaches them.
- Sunglasses should always be used with other sun-protection measures, such as seeking shade, wearing SunSmart clothing and hats and applying sunscreen.

How UV radiation can damage your eyes

UV radiation can cause both short-term eye problems and permanent eye damage. Short-term problems include excessive blinking, swelling, and difficulty looking at strong light. UV exposure can also cause acute photo keratopathy, which is sunburn of the cornea, like snow blindness or welders' flash burns.

Exposure to UV radiation over long periods can cause more serious damage to the eyes, including:

- cataracts (cloudiness of the lens), which may require surgery
- solar keratopathy (cloudiness of the cornea)
- cancer of the conjunctiva (the membrane covering the white part of the eye)
- skin cancer of the eyelids and around the eyes
- pterygium (pronounced tur-rig-i-um), an overgrowth of the conjunctiva onto the cornea.

Protecting your eyes

Wear a hat

Sunglasses and a SunSmart hat can stop up to 98% of UV radiation reaching your eyes.

Choosing the right sunglasses

Sunglasses don't have to be expensive to be effective, but some cheaper fashion sunglasses don't provide good sun protection.

Make sure your sunglasses:

- meet the Australian Standard 1067: the Standard has five categories of sun protection, ranging from 0 (very low sunglare protection, some UV protection) to 4 (very high sunglare reduction, good UV protection). Choose sunglasses that have at least category 2 sun protection and an eye protection factor (EPF) of 10.
- are wrap around and close-fitting and have large lenses, which help to reduce reflected UV radiation and glare that can pass around the edge of the sunglasses.

Sunglasses for children

There is no recommended age for a child to start wearing sunglasses, but the earlier their eyes are protected against UV radiation the better. If you buy sunglasses for your baby or child, make sure they meet the Australian Standard 1067 and fit closely to their face. Avoid toy sunglasses, which are great for dress-ups but little use for sun protection.

Even without sunglasses, a well-designed hat can substantially reduce the amount of UV radiation reaching children's eyes, while also protecting their face, neck, ears and head. Recommended hats are broad brimmed (brim size at least 6cm), legionnaire or bucket (brim size at least 5cm).

Avoid baseball caps — they don't protect the ears or back of the neck.

Prescription sunglasses

The Australian Standard doesn't cover tinted or clear prescription glasses and it's best to talk to your optometrist about your options. Some tinted or clear prescription lenses protect against UV radiation, or lenses can be coated with a UV-protective layer. However lenses that darken when exposed to sunlight reduce glare but may not filter out UV radiation.

Eye protection at work

For sun protection in the workplace, tinted eye protectors that comply with Australian Standard 1337:1992 provide at least the same amount of protection against UV radiation as sunglasses.

Eye protection at the snow

Snow blindness — sunburn on the surface of the eye — is a risk at the snow. While it usually lasts only a few days, snow blindness can be painful and contribute to long-term damage, such as cataracts.

When at the snow always protect your eyes from glare and reflected UV radiation with wrap-around sunglasses or snug-fitting goggles.

Check the label to ensure glasses or goggles meet the Australian Standard 1067.

Further information

For more information please visit our website:
www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart