

Protecting your eyes from the sun

Key point

- Ultraviolet (UV) radiation can damage your eyes, as well as your skin.
- Wear close-fitting and wrap-around sunglasses.
- Always check the tag to make sure they meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003 and have an eye protection factor (EPF) of 10.
- A broad-brimmed, legionnaire or bucket-style hat will shade your eyes, reducing the amount of UV radiation reaching them.

How UV radiation can damage your eyes

Ultraviolet (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

Choose 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 AS/NZS 1067:2003. The Standard has five categories of

sun protection, ranging from 0 (very low sun-glare protection, some UV protection) to 4 (very high sun-glare reduction, good UV protection).

- Choose sunglasses that are labelled 'category 2' or higher on the swing tag. These sunglasses absorb 95% of UV radiation.
- Some sunglasses are marked with an Eye Protection Factor (EPF). An EPF of 9 or 10 provide excellent protection, blocking almost all UV radiation.
- 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 sunglasses.

Wear a hat: Combining sunglasses and a sun-safe hat can reduce UV radiation from reaching your eyes by up to 98%.

Sunglasses for children

There is no recommended age for a child to start wearing sunglasses, but the earlier young eyes are protected against UV radiation the better. If you buy sunglasses for your baby or child, make sure they meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003 and fit closely to the face. Avoid toy sunglasses, which are great for dress-ups but of 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 for children are:

- broad brimmed (brim size of at least 6cm)
- legionnaire-style
- bucket (brim size of at least 5cm).

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. 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, safety sunglasses that comply with the Australian Standard AS/NZS 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 can 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 that meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067:2003

Cancer Council NSW recommends that when the **UV Index** is 3 or above, you should protect your skin in five ways:

- Slip on clothing that covers your arms and legs
- Slop on 30+, broad-spectrum sunscreen
- Slap on a broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire hat
- Seek shade
- Slide on wrap-around sunglasses.

For more information on skin cancer prevention and sun protection, visit our website www.cancerCouncil.com.au/sunsmart.