



# Don't Risk it!

By Brenda Fishbaugh

**Almost everyone** knows that overexposure to UV light can cause erythema – also known as sunburn – and we know those symptoms well. They include reddening of the skin, an itching sensation, and in more extreme cases, blistering and peeling. But did you know that you can also burn your eyes if you overexpose them to UV light?

**Photokeratitis** is the medical term for a burn of the cornea caused by overexposure to UV light. What makes photokeratitis – sometimes called “snow blindness” – especially risky is that you won't know you've overexposed your eyes until it's too late! And even worse, corneal burns don't just happen to “extreme” tanners. Just one unprotected session of any length in a base-level tanning system can result in a corneal burn.

If you've spent the day at the beach without wearing sunglasses, then you've probably experienced photokeratitis. Likewise, if you've ever tanned indoors without eye protection, you may have

burned your corneas; you may recall itching and excess watering or feeling like you had sand in your eyes. That wasn't sand, that was your cornea peeling! Your eye doesn't tan like your skin does, it just peels!

Photokeratitis is the No. 1 reason indoor tanners visit emergency rooms after a single tanning session. The good news is that corneal burns can

be treated, and the pain reduced with prescription numbing drops, as well as cold compresses. Antibiotic eye drops are also essential, to prevent serious infection of the open wounds on your cornea.

As bad as this sounds, the long-term effects of repeated overexposure to UV light are much worse, and in many cases, incurable. Maybe you've always thought that closing your eyes during a UV tanning session was enough protection. Many uninformed tanners think that closing their eyes will prevent them from burning; unfortunately, eyelids block less than 25 percent of damaging UV rays.

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**About the Author:**

Tanning industry veteran Brenda Fishbaugh is president of Eye Pro, Inc., makers of disposable eyewear. She travels extensively training salons on the effects of UV light on vision.



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