

# Going Flat Out!

By Brenda Fishbaugh

I receive many emails from tanners concerned about protecting their vision when tanning. Here is one about a common mistake that can easily be avoided.

*Dear Brenda:*

I had my first sunbed session yesterday and used the gold eye stickers. I did not put them on correctly and just stuck them like a sticker on my eyelid. I was in the tanning bed for eight minutes. My eyes were also closed the whole time – do you think I damaged my eyes?

Thanks for your help,

*Rob*

I responded:

*Hi, Rob:*

Thanks for your question – it’s a good one. I appreciate you caring about your eyesight enough to ask. Shame on the salon staff for not explaining how to use disposable eye protection!

The display box for every disposable brand has a diagram that shows assembly, as well as a photo of a person properly wearing the product. You’ll also find directions on the back of every pair, regardless of manufacturer. We recommend that salons display the stickers folded into cones placed on top of the box, so tanners see how to use them properly.

Luckily, disposables are a complete UV-block, so wearing the sticker flat on your eyelid protected you reasonably well, but didn’t block all of the ambient light that may reach the sides of your eyes. In addition, it probably created a big, white “raccoon eye” tan line, since the sticker covered more of your eye area than is necessary for vision protection. When folded into cones, the stickers block ambient light and you can see through them, allowing you to adjust sunbed controls and check the timer without removing the eye protection. In a booth, vision is also critical for a safe exit.

The greatest danger to your eyes during indoor tanning is photokeratitis, or an eye burn, which causes redness, itching and watering. Many describe it as painful, like having sand in their eyes. That isn’t sand – it’s your cornea peeling! It’s the most common reason a tanner seeks medical treatment after a single session, as reported yearly by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If you didn’t have tearing or pain, then you probably did not burn your corneas. Most other damage, such as night blindness, color vision loss and growths on the eye are caused by repeated exposure to intense UV. Remember, damage from indoor and outdoor tanning accumulates

over time, so please wear your FDA-compliant disposables indoors and UV400 block sunglasses outdoors. Forget styles with small lenses – they don’t block enough ambient light. Snug-fitting, wrap-around styles are the best protection.

As for closing your eyes while tanning, it’s a common myth that closed eyes are protected. The eyelid is the thinnest skin on

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our bodies (really!) and it blocks less than 25% of UV. So, closing your unprotected eyes while tanning is not preventing damage. Additionally, it IS fine to open your eyes when wearing compliant eye protection. Some tanners like to text or play games on their phones, and that’s absolutely okay.

Of course, only an eye exam can determine damage. If you ever experience eye pain after tanning, even if you wore protection, please see your eye doctor.

Thanks for valuing your vision enough to protect it while enjoying the benefits of indoor tanning!

*Brenda* ■



### 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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