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Eye to Eye



Just wear it!

By Brenda Fishbaugh

I was standing in a tanning salon lobby recently when the salon professional asked a tanner, “May I see your eye protection?” The tanner said she didn’t wear goggles. The salon pro replied, “You can get cataracts from unprotected tanning sessions.” The tanner kind of shrugged and headed back to her tanning room without any eyewear – clearly, she felt that cataracts happen to one’s grandma, not to her.

I was surprised to learn that a ton of middle-aged folks get cataracts, not just the elderly. Over 22 million people in the U.S. over the age of 40 have cataracts. Tens of thousands will lose their sight and millions more will have poor vision because of cataracts, reports the University of Maryland Medical Center.

“Ultraviolet light can accelerate the aging process and we see cataracts in much younger people,” says Dr. Mark Kimpel, a retired ophthalmologist, formerly with the Mayo Clinic and Indiana University Medical Center. “I constantly tell young people that you might not see the damage now, but it is like sunburn; you are accumulating the damage for later.” Dr. Kimpel, a sunbed user, strongly recommends wearing FDA-compliant eye protection during indoor tanning sessions and UV-block sunglasses outdoors.

The University of Maryland Medical Center explains that the ultraviolet rays from sunlight or sunlamps penetrates the thin skin of the eyelid. Unprotected exposure causes cataracts by creating changes in the lens and is also responsible for macular degeneration, which causes blindness. UV over-exposure creates oxygen-free radicals, called oxidants, which are unstable molecules that can cause cataracts. If you smoke cigarettes, drink heavily or take certain drugs, you have even a higher chance of cataracts, as you’ll have more oxidants

“running around” in your body.

So you tan indoors without eye protection? Never fear ... cataract surgery is here! The National Eye Institute reports that

cataract surgery is one of the most effective surgical procedures, with 90% of patients reporting better vision afterward. During the procedure, your surgeon makes an incision on your eyeball and uses ultrasound to break the clouded lens into small fragments, then sucks out the tiny pieces with a small vacuum. A replacement lens is then placed in your eye and the incision sutured shut. A few minor details: you may need to wear big, heavy, wrap-around sunglasses in bright light for several months since your eyes will be very sensitive to light. Complications could lead to permanent vision loss, and it’s important to note that 30% of cataract patients need another surgery in one to five years. Make sure you have insurance and vacation time for recovery!

People who work outdoors (such as life guards, construction workers and landscapers) or live close to the equator (Florida and Texas) have a much higher risk for developing cataracts if they do not make a practice of wearing UV-BLOCK sunglasses when they are working – either in sunny or cloudy conditions. Some sunglasses are just dark lenses and don’t block UV; check to ensure that your sunglasses are certified UV-Block or labeled UV 400.

Although you may be able to regain your vision with surgeries, cataracts can never be cured. Stop squinting and put on your FDA compliant eye protection! ■



About the Author:

Tanning industry veteran Brenda Fishbaugh is president of Eye Pro, Inc., makers of disposable eye-

wear. She travels extensively training salons on the effects of UV light on vision.



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