



Dear Brenda ...
By Brenda Fishbaugh

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 shut the whole time. Do you think I did any damage to my eyes?
Thanks for your help,
Rob

Hi Rob,

Thanks for your question; it's a good one. And, I also appreciate you caring about your eyesight enough to write to me.

Shame on the tanning salon you visited for not properly explaining how to use disposable eye protection! I'd seriously consider finding a different salon if your new salon is so indifferent to a new tanner that they didn't take the time to ensure you were familiar with your eye protection.

The display box for every brand of disposable eye protection features a diagram that shows assembly, as well as a photo on

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

the front of the box of a person properly wearing the product. You'll also find directions on the back of every pair of disposable eye protection, regardless of manufacturer. We also recommend that the salon staff fold the eyewear into a cone and place it on top of the display box, so that tanners can see how to use the product properly.

Luckily, disposable eye protection is a complete UV block, so wearing the sticker flat on your eyelid would have protected you reasonably well. Disposables worn flat don't block all of the ambient light that may reach the sides of your eyes. The biggest concern is probably that you received a big, white "raccoon eye" effect, since the product covered more of your eye area than is necessary for vision protection while tanning. Folding the sticker into a cone blocks ambient light and also allows you to see through it during your tanning session allowing you to adjust

your stereo, fans and facial tanners, check the time remaining, all without removing your eye protection. Being able to see is

also critical during a stand-up session, when vision is necessary to safely exit the booth.

The greatest danger to your eyes during a tanning session is photokeratitis, or an eye burn. It's also called "welder's flash" or "snow blindness." The tanner experiences red, itchy watery eyes and many describe it as extremely painful, like they

have sand in their eyes. That isn't sand in your eyes, that is your cornea peeling! It's actually the most common reason a tanner seeks medical treatment after a single tanning session, as reported yearly by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). If you didn't have tearing and painful eyes, then you probably didn't 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 UV exposure accumulates over time, so please wear your FDA-compliant disposable eye protection indoors and UV 400 block sunglasses outdoors. Forget the stylish sunglasses with small lenses – they simply don't block enough ambient light. Wrap-around styles that fit snugly are the best protection.

You mentioned you kept your eyes closed during your tanning session; it's a common myth that closing your eyes protects them. The eyelid is the thinnest skin on our bodies (really!) and it blocks less than 25 percent of UV. So, closing your eyes without eye protection is not preventing damage. Additionally, it IS fine to open your eyes during a session when wearing compliant eye protection. Some tanners even like to text and tan or play games on their cell phones, and that's absolutely fine.

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

Once again, 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.