

# Shopping for Sunglasses: The Benefits of Sun Protection for The Eyes

By Andrew S. Bruce, LDO, ABOM  
Licensed Master Optician and Manager  
Watters Vision Care in Battle Ground

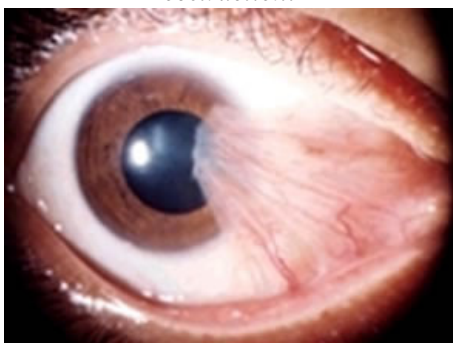


With the sun beginning to finally show its too often hidden face, now is a great time to discuss the need for good quality eye protection from the sun. Society is very much aware of the harm Ultraviolet, or UV exposure can cause the skin, and the need to use sunscreen to reduce the risks of skin cancer. However, what about the UV damage to the eyes? Are name brand sunglasses simply more expensive because of the branding? Is there any advantage to purchasing a high quality pair of sunglasses over a pair of \$12 specials at the local gas station, and what should the consumer look for when making such an investment? Also, what is the best type of sunglass protection for children?

First of all, UV-A & UV-B rays are an invisible form of radiation produced by the sun that, in addition to causing sunburn, can damage the eyes if left unprotected. UV-A rays have the potential to affect the central part of your vision by contributing to the development of macular degeneration – an irreversible, sight threatening, eye disease. UV-B has the potential to cause snow blindness during snow activities – a temporary, but painful burning of the cornea, and also, studies strongly suggest that prolonged exposure can cause, or at least accelerate the development of cataracts – a clouding of the crystalline lens of the eye. In addition, UV-B rays are also suspected to contribute to eye growths such as a pterygium which forms on the cornea and can lead to impaired vision, requiring surgical removal. In the same way freckles form on the skin, they can also form inside the eye on the pigmented layer beneath the retina. Although usually benign, since UV exposure is cumulative, preventative steps should be taken to reduce the risk of developing cancerous changes in pigmentation.

Rarely is sunscreen used directly around the eyes, leaving the eyelids unprotected and at risk for developing skin cancer. So, when shopping for quality sunglasses, be sure to select a frame that is large enough to provide adequate protection for the eyes, eye brows, and lids.

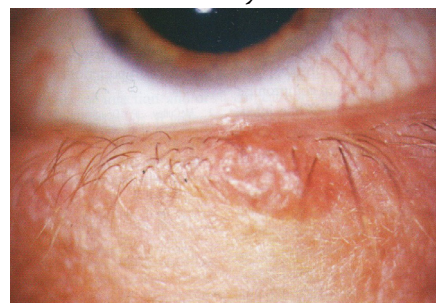
***A Pterygium growing on the cornea and over the pupil, causing partial vision obstruction.***



The American Optometric Association recommends that sunglass lenses must block at least 99% of UV-A and UV-B rays. Not all sunglasses meet these standards. All the sunglasses we carry at Watters Vision Care meet, if not exceed, these standards. Your eye care professional is the best one to advise you on the most suitable sunglasses for you. Low quality sunglasses not only use poor quality plastic for the lenses, which can cause eye strain and fatigue with prolonged use, but also often lack long lasting UV protection. Due to the application process of the UV protection in these low quality alternatives, over time, the UV protective layer can actually wear off. The dark lens in the sunglasses also has the effect of making the pupil larger, which then, due to deterioration of the UV protective layer, ironically allows more UV rays to enter the eye than if not wearing sunglasses at all! When you make the investment in a high quality pair of sunglasses, you are investing in your long term eye health. It's not all about branding; it's about the quality of the product, the quality of the optics used in the lens material, and the quality, and long term stability of the protection provided.

When it comes to children, for those who require corrective lenses, the most convenient form of sunglass protection are photochromic lenses, such as Transitions. These lenses not only change from light to dark when they go outside, but also provide 100% UV protection. Studies have shown that 80% of our lifetime's sun exposure occurs before we reach 18 years old. This indicates how important it is for all children, even those who don't require corrective lenses, to have good quality eye protection from UV rays. Although spending \$70 to \$80 on a pair of sunglasses for a child may be hard to justify for some, the long term benefits cannot be over emphasized. Their eyes will thank you for many years to come.

***Basal cell carcinoma (skin cancer) on the lower eye lid***



Visit your eye care professional and discuss the best sunglasses for your personal needs and lifestyle. Our goal and mission at Watters Vision Care is to provide you with the best service, the highest quality product, and superior eye care. Our highly experienced doctors and opticians will advise you on how best to protect your eyes for good, long term eye health. Stop in and see us today.