



# Protecting Your Eyes from the Sun

Protecting your eyes from ultraviolet (UV) radiation is just as important as putting on sunscreen to protect your skin. It is an important consideration in every season of the year. Many age-related eye diseases may be partially caused by UV exposure throughout your life. Infants and young children are especially vulnerable to UV radiation.

**TOLL-FREE 1.800.272.8843**  
**optometrists.ab.ca**

Alberta  
Association  
of Optometrists



## CAUSE

We may not be able to see UV light, but it is absorbed by the tissue of the eye and can cause serious eye damage. Because exposure to UV is cumulative, direct contact with sunlight for even short periods of time can cause several long-term eye health problems.

Conditions directly related to UV exposure include:

- cataracts;
- macular degeneration;
- photokeratitis (sunburn of the cornea);
- pingueculae (small yellowish bumps on the white of the eye); and
- pterygium (opaque growth over the surface of the cornea).

Children are at greater risk because they spend more time outdoors than the average adult and the crystalline lens in their eyes has less capability to filter UV.

## DIAGNOSIS

- Short-term effects of UV exposure can result in a condition known as keratitis, which is like having a sunburn on the eye.
- Symptoms include pain, redness and blurred vision.
- Keratitis is treated with artificial tears and usually takes 24 to 72 hours to resolve.
- Many long-term problems caused by UV exposure, such as cataracts, macular degeneration and melanomas are initially symptom free.
- These eye diseases only show symptoms when the condition is advanced and difficult, or even impossible, to treat.

## PREVENTION

Your optometrist can make specific recommendations to ensure your eyes are well-protected from the harmful effects of UV radiation.

- Clear, UV-blocking coatings are available for all lenses.
- If you want protection from UV rays, as well as comfort from glare and brightness, tinted glasses work best.
- Options include permanently tinted sunglasses or photochromic lenses, which get darker with increased UV intensity, but offer UV protection even when clear.
- You can also use clip-on sunglass lenses that attach to your regular glasses, or large sunglasses that fit over your regular glasses, to block UV light.
- Tinted lenses do not necessarily block UV light, so it is important to ensure your lenses provide 100% UVA and UVB protection.
- You can also get contact lenses with UV protection.
- In addition to UV-blocking lenses, wearing a wide brimmed hat or baseball cap also provides further protection.

Optometrists complete a Bachelor of Science degree or higher, followed by a four year Doctor of Optometry degree from an accredited university. They are a primary source for all your vision, eye health and eyewear needs. If you do not currently have an optometrist, visit our website at [www.optometrists.ab.ca](http://www.optometrists.ab.ca) and click on *Find an Optometrist*. This will provide a list of optometrists in your area.

**For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website's Eye Health Library.**  
**[optometrists.ab.ca/eyehealthlibrary](http://optometrists.ab.ca/eyehealthlibrary)**