

Summer Eye Care

What you need to know to keep your peepers bright and healthy all summer long.



It's official – the kids are out of school and the summer is here! As your summer kicks into high gear, here are a few tips to keep your eyes healthy all summer long.

1. **Wear your sunglasses.** Sunglasses are more than a fashion statement. They actively block dangerous UV-A and UV-B rays. UV damage adds up over time, so the sooner you begin protecting your eyes, the better, even if you're in your teens or early adult years. Doing so may reduce risks for pterygium (a benign growth), cataract, age-related macular degeneration and uveal cancer (similar to skin cancer). A 2009 survey by the American Optometric Association found that one in three adults are unaware of the eye health risks of spending too much time in the sun without proper protection. Just 29% of parents say they make sure their children wear sunglasses while outdoors. So make sure children are protected. Not only will it protect their eyes today, but it will teach them good eye health for tomorrow.
2. **Wear your sunscreen. And your hat.** Too much sun exposure damages the delicate skin around your eyes causing everything from wrinkles to skin cancer. Keep your eyes beautiful by using proper sun protection.

3. Swim without contacts. Water and contacts do not mix. The best way to protect your eyes from eye infections brought on by exposing contacts to water and improper cleaning is to leave them out when hitting the pool or beach. If you feel you need your contacts even while swimming, be sure to wear your goggles and to properly clean your contacts with cleaning solution after your swim. A little care now can prevent eye infections later.
4. Drink your water. And bring some tears with you. Your eyes need moisture. Being well hydrated helps keep your eyes moist. If your eyes do not make enough tears, you may suffer from dry eyes. This condition is quite common but can be exacerbated when out in the sun and wind. While it may sound strange, people with dry eye may find their eyes water quite a bit. This is because the eye is responding to the irritation of this condition. Dry-eye sufferers may find that they feel like they cannot keep their eyes open for very long. They may also find their eyes feel more uncomfortable after reading or watching television. If you think you might suffer from dry eyes, throw a bottle of artificial tears (available at any local drug store) in your beach bag and keep your eyes feeling fresh and comfortable.
5. Be prepared for some sand to fall. Between kids, wind, and towels, it is inevitable that a piece of sand will land (“Agggghh!”) right in your eye. When that happens, it pays to be prepared. The first rule of thumb is to not rub it. Rubbing increases the risk of the sand scratching the cornea, which is extremely painful. Next, begin irrigating the eye with water to flush the piece of sand out. Tilt your head back, using your index finger and thumb open your eye wide, and flush the eye with a gentle but forceful stream of water. A sports-cap water bottle works extremely well, or a plastic water bottle with a hole poked into it. If neither of these is available, use whatever fresh water you have. If the eye continues to pain you, go to an ophthalmologist to make sure you have not scratched your cornea.
6. Keep an eye on the ball. Baseballs, tennis balls, Frisbees, and volleyballs are all part of summertime fun, but be careful to not throw them near anyone’s eyes and be sure to wear the appropriate protective eye wear. If someone does get hit in the eye with a ball, apply ice immediately. If vision seems affected or worse, go to an ophthalmologist.
7. Enjoy the fireworks, but leave the displays to the professionals and watch from a safe distance. Each Fourth of July, thousands of people are injured from using consumer fireworks. Children are the most common victims of firework accidents, with those fifteen years old or younger accounting for half of all fireworks eye injuries in the United States. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 9,000 fireworks-related injuries happen each year. Of these, nearly half are head-related injuries with nearly 30 percent of these injuries to the eyes. One-fourth of fireworks eye injuries result in permanent vision loss or blindness. Enjoy the holiday but leave the fireworks to the professionals and do not use sparklers.

8. Chill. Chilled cucumbers or tea bags applied over the eyes works wonders in calming and refreshing tired eyes after a long day at the beach.
9. Rest. Nothing is more important to your eyes than sleep. Closing your eyes acts like a bandage to your eyes and gives your eyes time to heal from the typical wear and tear of a normal day. So take a siesta. You'll wake with eyes that are brighter, fresher, and rested.
10. Schedule your yearly eye appointment now. Kids need to have an eye exam every year for school, so when you are scheduling their exams take the time to schedule one for you, too. Prevention is the greatest way to care for your eyes and ensure you maintain healthy vision. That means going to an eye doctors (either an optometrist or ophthalmologist) once a year and getting your eyes dilated every other year. Getting your eyes dilated allows your eye doctor to look inside your eye and catch any eye disease and treat it before it becomes a problem. One of the greatest tragedies of eye health is that by the time the symptoms of eye disease are noticeable the disease is often too far along for effective treatment. Catching eye disease early could save your vision, and that makes for an extremely bright summer!