

Sunglasses an Eyecare Must

For years, we've referred to them casually as "shades." For sure, that nickname reflects the laid-back, cool vibe that goes along with sunglasses. And, for many, they mean fashion, not health.

Think again. We talked with Stephen Cohen, O.D., a VSP doctor from Scottsdale, Ariz., to find out the facts.

"Sunglasses used to be more about looking stylish than about taking care of your vision, but not anymore," says Dr. Cohen. "Today, there's increasing evidence that ultraviolet rays in sunlight can significantly increase your risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration. Both conditions usually affect older people, and no wonder: years and years of sun exposure leave their mark over time."

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The doctor adds, "Because both conditions can threaten healthy vision, I recommend wearing sunglasses on sunny days year-round. Also, you'll experience better night vision when you wear sunglasses on sunny days."

There are a few main things to look for when picking the right pair of shades for you. Says Dr. Cohen, "When buying sunglasses, make sure they carry a consumer-protection label stating they're 99 or 100% UV-absorbent, or provide UV absorption up to 400 nanometers (nm)."

"Once you've eliminated the threat from UV light, you can focus on other issues, such as reducing glare and choosing a tint that will allow you to control the degree of brightness reaching your eyes."

Here's a rundown of other things to consider when picking the perfect pair:

- **Go big or wrap it.** Bigger frames and lenses, and also wrap-around styles, give you more UV protection (by blocking peripheral rays).
- **Go polar.** Polarized, that is. These lenses block out sunlight glare bouncing off windshields, pavement and other smooth surfaces.
- **Consider color.** Gray lenses are best. Why? They don't change colors. Green and brown lenses are good too.
- **Rx effects.** If you wear prescription glasses, why not add prescription sunglasses to your eyewear wardrobe?
- **Shade your specs.** You can make your regular glasses into sunglasses. Look for clip-on or magnetic tinted lenses that can attach to your specs.
- **Automate.** Ask your eye doctor about photochromic lenses. They automatically get darker outside, then return to normal inside.