BEAUTY

Can Sunglasses Protect the Skin Around Your Eyes?

The right sunglasses shield more than your vision, but their shape matters-and they work best as one part of your sun protection.

Your sunglasses are doing two jobs

You grab sunglasses because the light feels bright. Meanwhile, the frames are covering some of the most exposed skin on your face. That is not a cosmetic bonus. Sunglasses can protect both your eyes and the skin around them from sun exposure.

Ultraviolet (UV) rays are an invisible form of radiation. They can pass into skin and damage skin cells, contributing to wrinkles, dark spots and skin cancer. Sunburn and tanning are not signs that your skin has adapted successfully; both indicate that damage has already occurred.

The effects are not confined to midsummer. UV rays can reach you during any season, at any temperature and on cloudy days. Water, cement, sand and snow can reflect them. A cool walk, a cloudy commute or time beside a bright surface can therefore still expose the uncovered parts of your face.

Your eyes have their own reason to need protection. Short-term UV exposure can cause red, dry, painful or gritty-feeling eyes. Long-term exposure can increase the risk of cataracts, macular degeneration and pterygium, a tissue growth that can damage vision. One ordinary object can help cover both concerns.

The label matters less than the coverage

The useful words to look for are protection from both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. UVA reaches more deeply into skin than UVB and can damage connective tissue. UVB does not penetrate as deeply, but it can cause sunburn. Both can contribute to skin cancer.

Darkness alone is not the standard described in the guidance. What matters is whether the sunglasses block UVA and UVB. In the United States, most sunglasses meet that standard regardless of cost, so a higher price does not necessarily tell you that the UV protection is better.

Shape changes what the glasses cover. Wraparound sunglasses work best because they reduce the UV rays that can enter from the sides. Models with side panels are also recommended for people working outdoors. For the surrounding skin, that side coverage is the practical difference between a small shield and a broader one.

That does not mean you need the largest or most expensive pair available. It means the specification and shape deserve more attention than status. Look for UVA and UVB protection, then consider whether the frames sit in a way that gives useful coverage around the eyes rather than leaving the sides completely open.

The glasses do one defined job well. They protect the eyes and help shield the skin immediately around them.

What sunglasses cannot cover

Sunglasses are a shield, not a force field. They cover only part of the face, and reflected or side-entering UV can still reach exposed skin. Even wraparound frames do not replace protection for the forehead, cheeks, ears, scalp, neck or the rest of your body.

Broad-spectrum sunscreen filters both UVA and UVB rays. General guidance recommends a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, applied in a thick layer to exposed skin before you go outside. It wears off and should be reapplied after more than two hours outdoors and after swimming, sweating or towelling off.

A wide-brimmed hat adds shade over the face, ears and back of the neck. Tightly woven material such as canvas offers better protection than a straw hat with holes that allow sunlight through. Shade helps too, although sunscreen and protective clothing remain useful because UV exposure still occurs there.

The strongest protection comes from combining measures: sunglasses, sunscreen, a hat, clothing and shade. This is less elegant than believing one accessory solves everything, but it is more honest. The glasses do one defined job well. They protect the eyes and help shield the skin immediately around them.

Clouds do not call the day off

Sun protection is easy to file mentally under holidays, beaches and heat. UV exposure does not follow that filing system. Rays can reach you on cloudy and cool days, and the advice is to protect your skin throughout the year rather than only in summer.

Timing changes exposure. In the continental United States, UV rays are generally strongest

around the middle of the day, although the precise hours vary with daylight saving time. If you can choose when to do an outdoor task, moving it away from those strongest hours is another way to reduce exposure.

The daily UV Index can also help you decide when protection matters. Guidance recommends protecting your skin from excessive exposure when the index is 3 or higher in your area. Sunglasses are particularly easy to overlook on a day that looks grey but still carries meaningful UV exposure.

There is also no useful "base tan" to bank before a sunny trip. A tan is a sign that UV has damaged skin, and indoor tanning exposes you to UVA and UVB as well. It does not prevent a later sunburn. Sunglasses belong in a strategy that reduces exposure, not one that tries to prepare skin by damaging it first.

Build a door-side sun kit

On Monday, place three things together near the door you use most: wraparound sunglasses that protect against UVA and UVB, a wide-brimmed hat made from tightly woven fabric, and broad-spectrum sunscreen. The point is not to create a complicated routine. It is to remove the daily search that makes protection easy to skip.

Before heading outside, choose the sunglasses by protection and coverage rather than price alone. Put on the hat when practical. Apply sunscreen to exposed skin, including areas the glasses and hat do not fully shade, and take it with you if you will be outside long enough to need another application.

If you work outdoors, spend time around snow or light-coloured sand, or cannot avoid the strongest daylight hours, the combination matters even more. Those settings can increase exposure, including through reflected UV. Shade your breaks when possible rather than treating sunglasses as permission to stay in full sun indefinitely.

Check your skin regularly as well. A new or changing spot or mole-particularly a change in its size, shape, colour or feel-is where this stops being an accessories question and becomes a reason to contact a healthcare professional. For the coming week, however, the first step is tangible: sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen waiting together by the door.

Where this comes from

- Sun Exposure

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/sunexposure.html

- Tanning

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/tanning.html
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