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Sporting the Perfect Shades

By Debbie DeAngelo
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What do you consider when buying a pair of sunglasses? The style? How you look in them? If you'd like to preserve your eyesight as you age, then there are a few other factors to eye-up.

The single most important feature of your shades is whether they provide complete protection from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays – both UVA and UVB. The radiation energy generated by the sun damages the eye's cornea and lens. Over time, this contributes to cataracts and macular degeneration; not to mention skin cancer of the eyelids. Since 80% of our lifetime exposure to UV radiation occurs prior to age 18, don't forget to shield your kids' eyes too.

With the innumerable shapes, sizes, and colors available, how can we select the best pair? Begin by making sure the label or sticker states “100 percent” UV protection, “400 UV” or carries the seal of approval from the American Optometric Association. This is a non-negotiable aspect of your sunglasses.

More than just a fashion accessory, your sunglasses should be perched on your nose daily to safeguard your vision. That includes overcast and winter days. Size matters. Oversized lenses or wraparound styles limit the light entering your eyes. They broaden the area of shading, so that it extends past the corners of the eyes and down onto the cheekbones.

Color doesn’t matter. Lens color has no bearing on the safety. Darker lenses don’t block more sun, but they can provide more visual contrast. This can be helpful when playing outdoor sports. Polarized lenses filter the glare from water, snow, and pavement. Mirrored ones reduce glare and completely disguise your eyes, while gradient lenses adjust to the lighting. Even though all of these characteristics may provide a better visual experience, none of this has any bearing on UV protection.

Performance sunglasses are made of durable polycarbonate plastic and high-quality lenses. These are typically used for sports. In the United States, all sunglasses must adhere to the impact safety standards established by the FDA. Although no lens is unbreakable, plastic lenses are less likely to shatter if you’re in a fender bender or take a hit to the face during pickleball.

What’s price got to do with it? Nothing. An expensive pair is no better than a bargain pair. Just be sure they offer complete UV protection. Also, evaluate the quality of the lenses. A quick check can be performed in the store by holding the sunglasses at arm’s length and looking at a distant door through the lenses. Move the glasses vertically and horizontally. If the door frame looks wavy or distorted, then pass on them.

When it comes to the age of your current sunglasses, if you’ve had them for a few years, ask an optician to check their ability to filter the UV rays. Also, for those who wear corrective lenses, customized sunglasses can be made specific to your prescription.

There are some situations in which standard sunglasses with 100% UV protection do not help. These include tanning beds, welding, and viewing a solar eclipse. Special lens filters are required for these.

Selecting sunglasses that uphold your vision needn’t be a complicated process. It just requires that you check a few of the safety attributes. Oh, and be sure to choose a pair you look great in too!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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