

Sight Matters

FAQ Sheets

Ultra-Violet Eye Protection

UV DAMAGE

In recent years, it has been shown that just like sunburn and skin cancers, exposure to ultra-violet (UV) radiation also causes eye damage.

Excessive UV exposure has become an increasing problem since the depletion of the ozone layer.

The Effects on the Eye

These adverse effects occur after exposure to ultra-violet radiation over many years.

The results in the eye include cataracts, pterygium and sight damaging retinal changes.



Example of cataract in the lens of the eye

The Need to Protect

Protection from the effects of UV is generally recommended if you work outdoors, enjoy outdoor recreations, or live in a sunny climate.

UV exposure is further increased on water, the beach or snow.

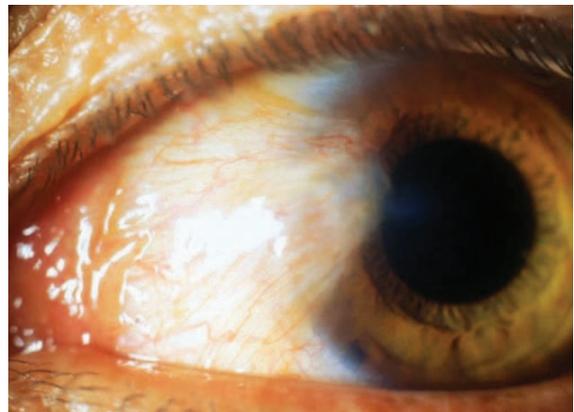
UV Eye Protection

The simplest way to protect your eyes from UV is to avoid it. Fortunately, a special lens coating can now filter out more than 99% of UV rays in the critical range (below 400nm).

A broad brimmed hat is also helpful.

PTERYGIUM

One of the most common effects of UV damage to the eye is pterygium. This is a triangular growth of thickened degenerative tissue on the white of the eye (called the sclera) that may also extend onto the cornea. It is usually on the nasal side.



Example of pterygium on the surface of the eye

The Cause

Pterygium is more likely to develop in people who work outdoors and spend a lot of time in the sun. It results from irritation due to the long term exposure to UV light, wind, glare or dust.

Symptoms

Many patients have no symptoms caused by a pterygium - they simply notice when they look in the mirror. Others experience redness, irritation, tearing and discomfort. The pterygium may also pull on the cornea (the window at the front to the eye) causing a distortion that results in astigmatism and blurred vision.

Treatment

The treatment of pterygium consists of eliminating the irritation by changing habits, or by using UV protecting eyewear or lubricating eye-drops. Sometimes a surgical removal under local anaesthesia is needed.