

## All You Need To Know About Sunglasses And Kids

by Mummyfique Contributor



With the sun usually shining brightly on our island, its rays often get in our eyes, making it hard to see properly, which is why we put on sunglasses, both to protect our eyes and to allow us to see clearly when it gets too bright outside. Adults aren't only ones whose eyes need protection from the sun's rays, children are just as susceptible to the harm that the sun can cause to the eyes. Dr Zena Lim, medical director, consultant ophthalmologist, adult and paediatric eye surgeon of The Children's Eye and ENT Centre tells us more about the harm that the sun can cause and how you should protect your minis' eyes.

**Mummyfique:** Can you share more about the type of damage that the sun can cause the eyes?

**Dr Lim:** Sun damage to the eyes occurs as a result of excessive UV exposure. UV rays have been shown to be harmful to the eyes, causing cataracts, retinal degeneration (specifically macular degeneration), pterygium (a benign growth of the conjunctiva) and melanomas (cancerous growths of pigmented tissue) occurring in the eyelids, iris and retina. These occur after many years of exposure and tend not to occur in children, though it may occur later on in life.

There is also another acute form of sun damage to the eyes – photokeratitis. This results in diffused inflammation of the cornea due to long unprotected periods of sun exposure such as when skiing or after a prolonged day at the beach.

**How should I protect my children's eyes against the sun's harmful rays and why is it important? Also, what are the differences in the different types of sunglasses available for kids in the market?**

It is essential to protect our eyes from harmful UV damage. This is akin to how we would apply sunblock to the skin. We can think of sunglasses as sunblock for our eyes.

As kids spend more time outdoors than adults do, it is essential for all children to stay protected from the sun. This is especially so as up to half a person's lifetime exposure to UV radiation can occur by age 18. With a good pair of sunglasses with UV protection, almost all harmful UV rays can be blocked from entering the eye.

#### ***Decoding the UV label***

When buying sunglasses for children, the first thing to look out for is the UV protection label. However, what is stated on the label is sometimes vague, with terms such as “UV-absorbing” or “blocks most UV light” – such sunglasses do not provide sufficient protection for your children's eyes. For peace of mind, go for trusted brands that offer 99 to 100 per cent UV protection.

If you chance upon the term “UV 400”, this implies that the sunglasses provide protection against UVB and UVA rays, filtering light up to the UVA threshold wavelength of 400 nanometers. Do note that the level of UV protection that sunglasses provide is separate and distinct from the tint density and colour of the lenses.

Even if a new pair of sunglasses has a reliable safety rating, UV protection can wear off over time. Most optical shops are equipped with machines that can estimate the degree of UV protection. If your sunglasses are old, get them to test the UV protection of your glasses – a pair of sunglasses with poor UV protection conversely allows more UV light to penetrate the eye, causing more harm than good.

#### ***Picking the right pair of sunglasses***

Try to select larger frames or wrap-around frames that have a close fitting design. A pair of loose or poorly fitted sunglass frame will allow harmful rays to enter through areas not well covered by the sunglasses, such as the outer corners of frames. Opt for impact-resistant polycarbonate lenses to prevent cuts to the region around the eye if the lens shatters during an accident.

For children, choose sunglasses made of lightweight, hypoallergenic plastic material as they prevent discomfort arising during and after wear. If your child is active in sports, there are special frame materials and styles designed to cater to various sports. Let your kids participate in the selection of their sunglasses as it will encourage them to wear them more often.

Another option parents should consider is polarised sunglasses to protect the eyes from the glare of the sun as they have polarising filters that block out distracting glares. Polarised sunglasses are great for water activities, a day out at the beach or fishing.

**Dr Zena Lim** is a USA fellowship trained Consultant Ophthalmologist and Adult & Pediatric Eye Surgeon. She is the Medical Director of Focal Eye Centre and **The Children's Eye & ENT Centre**.