



News From the AAO: Tips for Helping Eyes Cope With Winter Weather

Sept. 23, 2004 — Most people know to protect eyes from the sun during summertime activities. However, eyes need to be protected during the winter too. The American Academy of Ophthalmology — the Eye M.D. Association — offers the following tips:

- Wear sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of UV light, especially when the ground is covered in snow. People forget the sun is just as bright glinting off snow as it is off the ocean and beach, leading to sunburned eyes. High-quality, UV-blocking sunglasses can prevent this and reduce exposure to the wind and cold. UV light may contribute to cataract formation and retina problems later in life.

- Wear ski goggles to protect eyes while skiing or snow boarding. UV-light exposure increases at higher altitudes because the air is thinner and light glints off the snow, causing snow blindness. A pair of ski goggles with polycarbonate lenses, properly fitted, can block out harmful UV light. The goggles will also protect the eyes from hazards, such as tree branches and flying ski pole tips.

- Use a humidifier in the bedroom during months with low humidity. This helps moisten dry eyes, especially when exposed to forced air heating.

- Bundle up by wearing a brimmed hat, wraparound sunglasses and a hooded jacket or coat. This will help block the swirling, cold wind from the eyes and prevent the tear film covering the eyes from evaporating.

- Contact lens wearers should limit their outdoor exposure and use artificial tears frequently. Soft contact lenses, in particular, are like little sponges. They need lots of moisture. If they start to dry out, they can change shape and stick to the eye, becoming painful and cloudy. Drinking alcohol can also enhance this problem.

- The academy recommends that anyone who experiences eye problems or injures should see their eye doctor as soon as possible.

