

Keeping an *Eye on Safety*



At the Greenville, Texas, practice of VSP doctor Jennifer Stone, O.D., the most frequent eye injury is metal foreign bodies in the eye, particularly among a large local population of welders. At another Greenville practice, Herbert Williams, O.D., reports a similar pattern of injuries, not only among the welders

but among local homeowners whose weekend activities include working in their yards or workshops. Such injuries may result in a few days of eye irritation, others in a loss of vision. Yet most eye injuries can be prevented — 90 percent of them in fact, says Prevent Blindness America — by wearing protective eyewear.

Knowing what to wear is one step in protecting your eyes. Knowing when to wear it is the other.

What are Safety Glasses?

Although safety glasses made of industrial strength glass and impact resistant plastic meet eye protection standards, the safest protective eyeglasses are made of polycarbonate, the most impact-resistant lens material. A material found in “bulletproof glass,” polycarbonate is so strong it has been used for astronaut helmet shields and space shuttle windshields.

Frames for safety glasses are also made of high-impact plastic or polycarbonate, and protective designs include goggles, wraps, and shields. Some feature rubber padding to cushion the frame against the face. Many of these styles are available in both prescription and non-prescription eyewear from an optical shop. Non-prescription sports eyewear can also be purchased in a sporting equipment store.

Safety on the Job

You should wear safety eyewear if you work where on-the-job hazards include flying objects, chemicals, or radiation. Some of these jobs include welding, grinding, machining, woodworking, chemical handling, and laboratory work. Even if you don't work in hazardous situations, you should wear protective eyewear when you walk through these areas.

Safety in the Home

What applies in the workplace, also applies to home. If you are using large equipment such as power saws, woodchippers, or lawn mowers, for example, protective eyewear should be part of your workshop or gardening equipment. Safety glasses can also protect your eyes from less obvious dangers such as a splash of weed killer. Even if your weekend escape is building model planes, safety glasses can protect your eyes from an unexpected squirt of hobby glue.

Safety on the Court

You should also wear protective eyewear while playing sports, “but most people do not,” says Dr. Williams. Yet, according to Prevent Blindness America, sports eye injuries account for more than 40,000 visits a year to hospital emergency rooms. Any sport with balls, racquets or flying objects “is particularly dangerous,” says Dr. Williams. A racquetball or handball traveling between 60 and 120 mph becomes a high speed projectile. Even a badminton shuttlecock can travel as fast as 60 mph.

Sports where players come in close contact with each other present additional dangers. “Basketball has a high rate of eye injury,” says Dr. Stone, “because of jabs by elbows and fingernails to the eye area.” Sports such as racquetball, where racquets are used in a confined space, also result in frequent eye injuries.

Whatever your lifestyle, when it comes to your sight put safety first: protect your eyes. •