We all know that it is important to protect our skin before going out in the sun. What many people don’t realize is that it is equally important to protect our eyes, as well. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation, including both UV-A and UV-B, is present on cloudy days, as well as sunny ones, although on sunny days they are stronger and more damaging. Therefore, when spending time outside during the day, it is important to remember to wear sunglasses. Furthermore, if possible, you should make sure that the sunglasses you wear offer at least 99% protection from harmful UV rays.

Unprotected exposure to the sun can cause photokeratitis, which is similar to having sunburn of the eyes. Like sunburned skin, the symptoms (which include light sensitivity and discomfort) generally are short-lived and do not cause permanent damage. Prolonged unprotected sun exposure, however, generally does lead to more severe and permanent damage, such as cataracts, age-related macular degeneration and changes in color and night vision. While everyone is at risk for developing eye problems from excessive UV exposure, people at higher risk than most include those with existing retinal disorders; people who take medications such as tranquilizers, diuretics, sulfa drugs, birth control pills and tetracycline; people who have already had cataract surgery; and individuals who regularly spend long hours in the sun.

Because many of the conditions caused by excessive sun exposure are irreversible, the old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is particularly true in this case. And the fact is, not only is it easy to protect your eyes from the sun, it is fashionable, as well. Following are some tips to keep in mind when shopping for sunglasses for yourself and your family, as well as some additional sun-related guidelines.

- When shopping for sunglasses, make sure that the label says that the ones you select block at least 99% of both UV-A and UV-B rays
- Optimally, lenses should be brown, gray or green and should be as large as possible
- Make sure children’s sunglasses are as powerful as your own
- Even if your sunglasses offer the most protection possible, do not stare directly at the sun while wearing them
- Try to stay out of the sun as much as possible between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. during the summer (this will benefit your skin, as well)
- Just because a lens is very dark, it does not necessarily block the required amount of rays
- Wearing a hat with a brim in addition to sunglasses is helpful in protecting eyes from harmful rays
- If you wear prescription glasses, you may want to consider getting photochromic lenses, which are eyeglass lenses that darken when exposed to UV light (although not all plastic photochromic lenses block 100% of the UV-A and UV-B rays)

To learn more about the Davis Vision program, call: 1.800.328.4728