

by Teresa McLamb

GOT TO WEAR SHADES

Fishing, year-round golf, surfing. They're high on the list of reasons we choose to live in this part of the world. Our blessing of sunny days gives us an enviable lifestyle, but it also can contribute to eye damage from UV rays.

The American Optometric Association recommends that everyone, including children, living near the beach wear sunglasses every time they're outdoors. "Eighty percent of sun damage is done before the age of 18," said Dr. Sara Brigman, Dr. Bonnie Fanelli treats many older patients. "It's important to have sunglasses on children when they're at the beach" and anywhere else outdoors. "It's important to put them on a child early." Dr. Bonnie Fanelli treats many older patients. "It's unfortunate that most of my patients in their 70's had no idea they needed sunglasses when they were five. It's sad to tell them they have lost their central vision because they didn't wear them when they were younger." "For anyone who does a lot of boating or fishing, it is really important to wear polarized sunglasses because it

cuts down on the glare and that's an added feature that not every pair of sunglasses has," Dr. Brigman said. She noted a Baltimore study done on men who worked on the water all the time indicated they were more prone to cataracts and macular degeneration. Optical quality polarized lenses are available, but even those who don't need prescription lenses should look for polarized ones, according to Dr. Scott Sikes, a colleague of Brigman and Fanelli. "Some surf shops sell them around the beach areas, or fishing shops. They should be 100% UV blocking" and labeled as such. Alternatively, polarized lenses purchased in an optical shop would be guaranteed. He recommends wearing sunglasses year round. "Even in winter you can have damage from sunlight exposure. Here

[in Wilmington] the amount of exposure is the worst problem. We're constantly outside, on the beach, on the water as well." He also stresses wearing polarized lenses when snow skiing to prevent snow blindness, and to steer away from gradient tinting or lightly tinted lenses.

Dr. Allison Bloodworth's four year old daughter Sarah has been encouraged to wear sunglasses. "We try to get cute ones that they like. We get fun colors, and there are some that have little characters on them." She said that optical quality is important even in children's glasses. "You can be assured you're getting UV protection."

To further protect the eyes, Bloodworth emphasizes that "eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, especially dark green leafy vegetables, can keep the macular pigment healthy. These foods are full of antioxidants." She encourages her patients to be physically active and to lead a healthy lifestyle which includes keeping blood pressure and sugar levels in the proper range. "Cigarette smoking contributes to macular degeneration," she said. Smoking and the squinting that occurs when not wearing sunglasses also accelerate the formation of wrinkles, Fanielli added.

Other easy and important ways to protect your sight are to wear safety glasses and to have regular check ups by a professional. "In surveys, people say their #1 fear is losing their eyesight," said Dr. Allan Barker, president of Eye Care Center. "A lot of things can threaten your eyesight. Especially

people over 40 should be checked for glaucoma. Let us check the pressure of the fluid in the eye." He said a lot of conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol can be dangerous to eye health. "The eye is the only place you can see a blood vessel without cutting into the body, so we can look in there and spot a lot of those conditions that affect the entire body. That's a good reason to come in for an eye exam." He noted that there have been cases where brain tumors were found through eye exams.

In addition to his concern for safety, Dr. Barker attempts to educate patients to new treatments. Those suffering from dry eyes can benefit from a prescription of Restasis, which he said works far better than over the counter products. "We see much more dry eye in women over fifty," he said, indicating that hormonal and environmental influences contribute to the issue. "We also recommend antioxidants and prescribe fish oil as Lovaza" which ensures its purity. Lastly, he notes that the eye lashes can be a filter to keep trash from the eyes. People who have lost their lashes because of cancer treatment or who have thin lashes can see good results from Latisse, a new eyelash growth product. "That's sort of fun."

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From Left: Dr. Allison Bloodworth, Dr. Bonnie Fanelli, Dr. Allan Barker, Dr. Scott Sikes, Dr. Sara Brigman, (c) Sarah Bloodworth. In business since 1954, Eye Care Center has more than fifty offices across the state.