

Eyes and the outdoors



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



Spending more time looking at this, and less time in front of a computer can be good for your eyes. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

Ever since the third grade, I have been burdened with terrible eyesight. At first, I thought that the world had gone blurry, possibly because of a communist plot. My grandmother informed me that the world had not gone blurry, but that perhaps I needed glasses.

Those were the cruellest words I ever heard. All of my plans of being a Professional Hunter in Africa were ruined. Who would want a Pro with the nickname Four Eyes? I lost the fight and have been forced to wear glasses ever since. Each year, the prescription gets just a few clicks worse. Add to that bifocals because of aging eyes, and I have the Full Monte of bad eyesight.

It is well established that our time outdoors is good for our overall health, but recent studies indicate that it can be good for our eyes as well. Although spending too much time in the sun without eye protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays can cause damage to the eyes and skin, new studies indicate that natural light may be essential for normal eye development in children.

Children today spend a great deal of time indoors, playing video games and staring into I-Pads and cell phones. My own grandkids are a case in point. I have not seen their face in years because it is always stuffed into a cell phone. Because of this, nearsightedness is more common today in the United States than it was back in

the 1970's. It is not just the kids as most of us stare into a computer on a daily basis.

Researchers don't know exactly why outdoor time is beneficial, but believe it's probably related to exposure to natural daylight rather than other specific activities. I must be the exception because I am very nearsighted and spent most of my childhood outdoors, except to eat and sleep, and for the time I was incarcerated in school.

Dry eyes are a problem that comes from too much computer and indoor time. Your eyes get dry when they don't make the tears properly or when tears dry out too rapidly. Dry eyes can be caused by allergies, medications, medical conditions, outdoor activities, and yes, even age.

Here in Colorado, we

have a very dry climate to start with. Much of our time is spent indoors, where our living space is either heated or air-conditioned, creating a lack of moisture in the air. Whenever I go outside for a walk, especially during the winter months, my eyes tear up the entire time. Skiers, bike rider, snowmobilers and ATV people all understand watery eyes when outdoors.

For anyone who loves to be outdoors, remember that Mother Nature is not particularly kind to our eyes, and we should take precautions when outdoors. Smoke from all the burning in the valley or distant forest fires, dust, all the pollen from everything that is in bloom, and a dry wind, all can make your eyes feel like coarse grit sandpaper.

If you are wearing

sunscreen or bug spray, you have to be careful when your activity causes you to perspire. Sweat mixing with the outside chemical on your skin can be a new experience in eye irritation. The main reason I never wear sunscreen on my face is because sweat mixing with the sunscreen stings up my eyes so bad I can't keep them open.

A comprehensive annual check-up from your eye doctor is a great place to start. Diseases like glaucoma, cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) have the best chance for treatment when detected early. The eye exam can also help detect diabetes in some people. While there, discuss your specific eye problems with the doctor. Eye drops help with dry eye, but not all eye drops are the same. You have to find

the eye drop that treats your specific dry eye.

While early detection of problems can help your eyesight, so can living a healthy lifestyle. Eating green leafy vegetables and eggs are good for the eyes because both are high in lutein and zeaxanthin, nutrients that have been found to reduce the risk of eye diseases. Eating foods high in vitamins A and C, along with vitamin E, have all been proven to promote eye health.

Folks who have diabetes are at a special risk of eye disease. If your blood sugar is too high, for too long a period of time, you run the risk of developing an eye disease called diabetic retinopathy, which can affect anyone with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, and is the leading cause of blindness in working aged adults.

Diabetes can also put you at increased risk for glaucoma and cataracts. Proper management of your diabetes is very important. Properly managed, most people with diabetes will never have any eye problems because of the disease.

If you spend lots of time outdoors, special care should be taken to protect your eyes from the ultraviolet rays the sun produces. UV radiation from the sun can trigger the onset of cataracts. It is a common misconception that cataracts are age related. Cataracts can and do occur at just about any age, and the sun can make them appear sooner.

Sunlight that is reflected from the surface of water or snow can cause conjunctivitis and keratitis. Symptoms of conjunctivitis, sometimes called "pink eye" include intense itching, a gritty feeling in the eye, redness, a watery discharge and a runny nose.

Keratitis is a generic term to describe a variety of corneal infections, irritations and inflammations of the eye. It

is important to obtain medical attention immediately because delay can cause scarring which would cause vision problems for the rest of your life.

Sunglasses and a hat are the ticket to prevent problems for your eyes from UV rays. Look for glasses that provide the 100 percent UV absorption. The label will say something like "UV absorption up to 400nm" which translates to 100 percent protection.

Polarized lenses are my choice for outdoors, but they are not necessarily the same as UV protected glasses. Polarized glasses have a special filter for reducing glare but may not provide maximum UV protection. UV protected lenses are treated with a special chemical to improve their UV absorption. The downside to polarized lenses is the thickness and the additional weight on your face.

All of my relatives wore glasses, so I guess it is hereditary that I am burdened with them. I just can't catch a break. Whenever you recreate outdoors, give your eyes some help and some protection from the harsh elements. If you didn't inherit bad eyes, you sure don't want to get them anyway by not taking care of your vision.

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a moment when federal agencies should be surging in capacity to protect Colorado communities from drought and fire, the Trump administration's cuts instead eliminated the scientists who forecast the risk of these disasters."

About 60 Forest Service jobs were cut from the 2.3 million-acre White River National Forest, the busiest forest in the country with more than

8 million annual visitors who stir an economic impact of more than \$1.6 billion in Colorado's high country communities.

Scott Fitzwilliams supervised the White River National Forest for 15 years before resigning last year as visitation soared and he was forced to slash his workforce.

A year later he still can't make any sense of the cuts.

"There was no rhyme or reason that I could see. They did not have any kind of strategic approach to the

downsizing. If they tell you differently, they are lying," he said in an interview with The Colorado Sun. "It just seemed random. When you think of the type of visitation we get and the needs of our forests, it's just disheartening to think about how fewer people are out there doing this critical work."

More than a third of those job losses in Colorado last year were newly hired or probationary employees on the frontlines of the agencies, including workers in visitor

services, field operations and emergency operations. Another third of the job losses came from the reassignment of Interior Department staff from regional offices to the department's headquarters in Washington, D.C.

And now the Forest Service, as part of a "sweeping restructuring" will be moving its headquarters from D.C. to Salt Lake City in a move that will close all 10 of its regional offices across the country, including the Region 2 headquarters in

Lakewood, where the Federal Center employs more than 6,000 workers in 28 federal agencies. The Forest Service also is consolidating all of its research centers into a single operation in Fort Collins.

"We need these foresters and oil and gas specialists on the ground here in Colorado," Fitzwilliams said. "I really do worry about the work getting done. I'm not sure they have a plan. It's like their war plan: 'Let's bomb these people and figure out what happens later.'"



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