



Eye on Health

American Academy of Ophthalmology Urges Athletes To Wear Protective Eyewear

(NAPSA)—From Major League Baseball stadiums to small-town basketball courts, athletic competition builds physical fitness, entertains millions and teaches the values of hard work and teamwork.



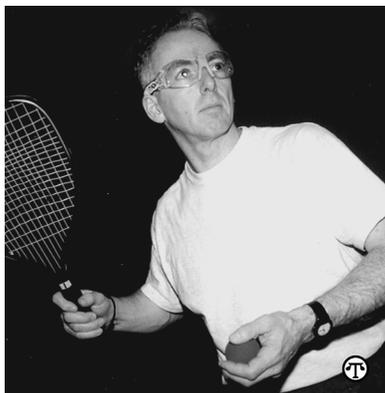
M. Bowes Hamill

But for more than 40,000 athletes each year, these lessons can be marred by an errant finger or misjudged catch. That's the number of sports-related eye injuries that occur annually in the United States. Approximately one-third of the victims are children.

April is Sports Eye Safety Month, and Eye M.D.s at the American Academy of Ophthalmology urge athletes to wear appropriate, sport-specific, protective eyewear properly fitted by an eye care professional.

"Athletes need to choose to use protective eyewear because eye injuries can be devastating," said Monica L. Monica, M.D., Ph.D., MHA, clinical correspondent for the Academy. "Eye injuries are one of the leading causes of visual impairment in children. The injuries range from abrasions of the cornea and bruises of the lids to internal eye injuries, such as retinal detachments and internal bleeding. Unfortunately, some of these young athletes end up with permanent vision loss and blindness."

Many sports create risk for eye injuries; however, protection is available for many activities, including basketball, baseball, hockey, football, lacrosse, fencing, paintball and water polo, as well



Athletes should guard their vision with properly fitted eye protection.

as racquetball, soccer and downhill skiing.

"Athletes can select from various types of lightweight and sturdy protective eyewear," said M. Bowes Hamill, M.D., associate professor of ophthalmology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and clinical correspondent for the Academy. "Eyewear properly fitted and worn does not hinder performance in any way, and can prevent most sports eye injuries."

Protective eyewear lenses should be made of polycarbonate, which can withstand impact from a ball or other projectile traveling at 90 miles per hour, Dr. Hamill said.

"Contact lenses offer no protection," he said, "and street wear glasses are inadequate to protect against any type of eye injury."

Most sporting leagues don't require children to wear eye protection, so parents must insist that their children wear eye protection when they play.

"When they do, the occurrence of eye injuries is greatly reduced," Dr. Monica said. "Parents also can set a good example by wearing eye protection when playing sports, and work to help pass local ordinances requiring children to wear protective eyewear when engaging in sports."

Accidents Happen

Sometimes even the most conscientious athletes can injure their eyes. Dr. Hamill said it is imperative to seek medical help immediately in case of injury.

"Injuries such as cuts or foreign bodies stuck in the eye are emergencies," he said. "Don't try to treat these injuries yourself; contact your Eye M.D. or go to the emergency room for help immediately."

Even a seemingly light blow can cause a serious eye injury. If a black eye, pain or visual problem occurs after a blow, contact your Eye M.D. or seek emergency medical help immediately.

"With just a little care and common sense, you can go a long way toward protecting your precious gift of sight," said Dr. Hamill.

About the American Academy of Ophthalmology

The American Academy of Ophthalmology is the world's largest association of eye physicians and surgeons—Eye M.D.s—with more than 27,000 members worldwide. Eye health care is provided by the three "O's"—opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists. It is the ophthalmologist, or Eye M.D., who can treat it all—eye diseases and injuries—and perform eye surgery. To find an Eye M.D. nearby, visit the Academy's Web site at www.aao.org.