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Sports Eye Injuries

Every year, hospital emergency rooms treat nearly 40,000 victims of sports eye injuries. All professional and recreational athletes participating in eye-hazardous sports need to wear eye protection. To help prevent sports eye injuries, protective polycarbonate eyewear should be worn whether or not prescription eyewear is needed. All prescription eyewear used during sports should be made from polycarbonate.

The sports causing the most eye injuries are basketball, baseball, and racquet sports, but any sport where an object can fly toward the eye is considered hazardous. Unbreakable eyeglass frames, goggles, or facemasks are required when there is a potential for eye injury. Polycarbonate lenses have the highest impact resistance of any eyeglass material. They are 20 times stronger than ordinary eyeglass material, and while not unbreakable, they do afford the best protection available against eye injury from any high-velocity object.

Helmets with eye shields are recommended for football and other contact sports. Many sports, such as baseball, hockey, and men's lacrosse, require a helmet with polycarbonate face mask or wire shield, especially for very young athletes. Face guards can be worn over glasses and are used primarily for football, ice hockey, and similar high-risk sports. Some sports such as hockey have established standards for eye protection at the national level.

For high-speed sports such as skiing, wear special frames sturdy enough to protect the eyes from any impact. Wear ultraviolet-absorbing goggles or sunglasses while skiing to protect the eyes from glare, ultraviolet rays, and exposure to weather.

Boxing presents a high risk for eye injury. Unfortunately, there is no adequate protection available.

Contact lenses are not a form of protective eyewear. Contact lens wearers require additional protection when participating in sports, especially if the contacts are of the rigid type.

People with only one functional eye should carefully consider the risks of contact sports. Wearing adequate eye protection is imperative for people with sight in only one eye.