

# The **eyes** have it

Training outdoors is one of the things we love about triathlon but constant exposure to the elements can take its toll, especially on your eyes. We asked the experts for advice on protecting two of your most important assets while you're out swimming, biking and running.

Text by Cassy Polimeni • Photography by Delly Carr, Natalie Delarey and Dreamstime Images 

It goes without saying that your eyes are pretty important. Eighty five per cent of the sensory information we receive is communicated through these delicate organs so even mild damage can seriously impair your quality of life. Unfortunately, even the most cautious athlete often overlooks the importance of good quality eyewear.

We are all well aware of the damaging effect ultraviolet (UV) rays can have on our skin and few among us would consider spending prolonged time outdoors without sunscreen but many athletes take eye protection for granted, settling for cheap fashion sunglasses or forgoing eyewear altogether during outdoor training sessions.

Wearing cheap dark lenses with inadequate UV protection can be even more damaging than not wearing glasses at all as the reduced light causes pupils to dilate, exposing them to further UV damage. So throw away those service station sunglasses and invest in your vision – your eyes will thank you.

## POTENTIAL DANGERS

UV damage can occur after even short periods of exposure. Conditions such as photokeratitis, an inflamed corneal condition caused by UV exposure particularly when combined with cold wind, can occur after a single unprotected session outdoors. Symptoms of photokeratitis include eye redness and grittiness, light sensitivity and excessive tearing. It is essentially sunburn of the eye and is a common but usually temporary condition that rarely causes permanent damage, however it is painful and uncomfortable and can easily be avoided with the proper protection.

Long-term exposure to UV rays can be more serious and lead to cataracts, caused by premature ageing of the lenses in your eyes. Even before cataracts are fully formed vision quality is reduced, particularly colour quality and the ability to perceive contrast.

UV exposure can also cause conjunctiva, cornea damage, irreversible retina damage and skin cancer on or around the eyelids, and can promote growths like pterygium, which appears in the corner of the eyes, or pinguecula, a yellowish lesion that appears on the white surface tissue of the eye.

Apart from the risks to your eye health, going unprotected can inhibit your performance on race day. Glare impedes your ability to perceive contrast and undulations on the course, while stone chips, wind, insects, dust, sand and pollen can cause excessively dry or watery eyes, irritation and infection. Choosing the right lens for the conditions is vital if you want to minimise glare and the resulting low visibility and eye strain. It is important to remember that various surfaces will increase reflectivity. Snow is the worst culprit, but triathletes will be more affected by sea (flat sea increases glare by 55 per cent), sand (15 per cent) and concrete (12 per cent). Both the terrain and the weather need to be considered when choosing the appropriate eyewear for the race or session ahead of you. Look for large lenses and wraparound designs to help protect against headaches and tearing or residual eye soreness caused by wind and other irritants.

FEW AMONG US WOULD CONSIDER SPENDING PROLONGED TIME OUTDOORS WITHOUT SUNSCREEN, BUT MANY ATHLETES TAKE EYE PROTECTION FOR GRANTED



## SAFETY MEASURES

Products making claims about UV protection are highly regulated in Australia with a strict rating system that ensures awareness of the level of protection offered. Cancer Council Australia and Eye Research Australia recommend glasses that are rated either UV 400 (which blocks 100 per cent of UV rays) or EPF (Eye Protection Factor) 9 or 10. They also recommend choosing close fitting wraparound sunglasses in order to reduce the risk of reflected glare and UV radiation that can pass around the edges of sunglasses with insufficient surface area.

A number of brands have tackled the specific challenges faced by triathletes in their own way. The Radar®, one of Oakley's most popular designs for athletes, features a Hydrophobic™ lens coating that repels water, skin oils and debris, promoting optimum vision in any environment. Contrast enhancing sunglasses like the Adidas LST™ lens can help make undulations visible in high glare situations that would obstruct the naked eye. For triathletes and open water swimmers there's Vorgee's Osprey and the new Eclipse goggles, released just last month. Both use the same polarised lenses found in leading sunglass brands to minimise the reflective glare off the water (see page 30 for information on how to select the perfect goggles for you).

Train safe, and enjoy the great outdoors. **P**

Sources: Cancer Council Australia, Eye Research Australia, Adidas, Oakley, Vorgee.

## IN FROM THE EMMAS



Photo: Delly Carr

"My first choice in eyewear would have to be the Oakley Radar. They're a bit larger than Oakley's Enduring or Commit shades but they provide great coverage for riding as well as running so they cover both bases. I like the straight arm with Path lens in Clear/Black Iridium Photochromic or Ice Iridium as I find those colours great for riding or running."

**EMMA SNOWSILL**  
OLYMPIC, COMMONWEALTH  
AND WORLD CHAMPION  
TRIATHLETE



Photo: Natalie Delarey

"I love my Oakley Radars. The women's style is slightly different to the men's and they come in all different colours so you can personalise them, plus there are lens shades to suit every weather condition."

**EMMA MOFFATT**  
OLYMPIC AND WORLD  
CHAMPION TRIATHLETE

## SNOWY'S TIPS FOR BEGINNER TRIATHLETES

- Invest in the basics, like a good pair of running shoes. Remember – prevention is better than cure!
- You don't need the fanciest bike on the block, but get a proper bike fit so you are set up correctly to avoid injury.
- Find other women to train with and enjoy the social aspect of exercising – it's not necessarily about being competitive.
- Find a coach who understands the basics of triathlon training and fitting the three disciplines in around your life. Choose someone you feel comfortable with, ask questions and learn as you go.
- Massage seems like a luxury (although it normally feels far from it!) but if you do it regularly (every 1-2 weeks) you can avoid any unnecessary niggles.

## MOFFY'S TIPS FOR BEGINNER TRIATHLETES

- Don't use up all your enthusiasm in the first few weeks, ease into a good routine and build from there. Starting off slow and steady will also allow your body to get used to training and decrease the chance of injury.
- Join a squad or get together with friends so you have a training plan. Making training social also makes it much more enjoyable.
- Make sure your equipment (i.e. bike, running shoes, eye wear) are the right fit for you, otherwise you risk injury and won't be able to do the training.
- Enter a race so you have something to train for – this keeps you motivated. There are many different distances available so choose one you're capable of and challenge yourself from there.
- Have fun!