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***Parents:* Here are 5 Steps to Protect Your Young Athletes’ Eyes**

*The Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Academy of Ophthalmology reminds parents that the right protective eyewear can significantly reduce the risk of eye injuries*

**Kimberly, WI** – Nearly 30,000 people suffer sports-related eye injuries every year. An astounding 90 percent of these ER visits could have been avoided if the athlete wore protective eyewear. Even the most low intensity sports activities pose some risk for eye injuries. From basketball to racquetball, from youth leagues to the pros, players need to protect their eyes. The [Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology](https://www.wieyemd.org/) and the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](http://www.aao.org/) are reminding the public that the best defense against potentially blinding [sports-related injuries](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/injuries-sports) is wearing protective eyewear.

“Young athletes typically care much more about their performance or the outcome of the game than they do about wearing the appropriate protective gear when playing sports. That’s understandable, but injuries can and do happen, so it’s important for athletes at all levels to wear protective eyewear anytime they suit up for competition,” said David Nash, M.D., President of the Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology. “Unfortunately, eye injuries are a leading cause of blindness in children, and a majority a of these injuries happen while kids are playing sports. Fashion aside, protective sports eyewear can help prevent injuries and allow young athletes to continue to play the sports they love.”

Among the common sports-related eye injuries ophthalmologists routinely treat are [corneal abrasions](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/corneal-abrasion), [bruising around the eye](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/black-eye), [retinal detachments](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/detached-torn-retina), and [internal bleeding](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/symptoms/blood-in-eye).

Here are some safety tips for all athletes to practice:

* Check and follow [sport specific requirements and standards](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/injuries-protective-eyewear) regarding eye protection.
* Consider replacing eyewear once yellowed or damaged to ensure the best protection.
* For basketball, racquet sports, soccer and field hockey, wear protective eyewear with polycarbonate lenses.
* For snow or water sports, consider eyewear with [UV protection](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/sun) to avoid sunburn or glare.
* Athletes who wear contacts or glasses should still wear eye protection; contacts and regular eyeglasses are not replacements for protective sports eyewear.

If you experience an eye injury, seek medical attention immediately, even if the injury seems minor; sometimes noticeable symptoms develop later.

“Getting athletes of any age to wear [protective eyewear](https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/injuries-protective-eyewear) is a challenge,” said Dianna Seldomridge, M.D., clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “Ophthalmologists hear all the reasons for not wearing eye protection: it’s cumbersome, it will impair peripheral vision, it will fog up. But sports goggles have vastly improved over the years. And if you start your kids early, wearing protective eyewear will become as natural as donning a batting helmet as they step up to the plate.”

For more information about eye health, visit the Academy’s EyeSmart [website](https://www.aao.org/eye-health).

**About the Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology**

The Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology (WAO) is a professional medical society comprised of Wisconsin ophthalmologists (medical eye doctors) who are committed to promoting quality eye care for the citizens of Wisconsin by providing its members with resources including professional education, legislative advocacy, and membership services to enhance the practice of ophthalmology in Wisconsin.

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