

Environmental Irritants And The Eyes

(NAPSA)—Some days, you can see an interesting phenomena: the sky seems almost brown, rather than clear blue. What causes the sky to turn brown? It's pollution or environmental irritants, from cars, factories, power plants and even wildfires. Not only are environmental irritants responsible for depleting the ozone layer and blocking out the sun's rays, they can also affect your health.

Burning eyes, coughing and chest tightness are common after exposure to high levels of pollution.

In fact, when the air quality is poor, your eyes may feel more dry, red and irritated than usual. In addition, you could find it more difficult to breathe because the irritants in the air are causing an allergic reaction in your lungs.

Here are some tips to consider next time you plan to spend time outdoors:

Wear an SPF sunscreen—environmental irritants have been shown to deplete the ozone layer, which allows more UV light to shine through the atmosphere. Protect yourself and wear a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.

Check the Air Quality Index—before you head outdoors, check the day's air forecast. If the forecast is poor, you should try to limit outdoor activities to the early morning hours and after sundown.

Use a lubricating eye drop—to combat the negative effects of environmental irritants on your eyes, consider using a lubricating eye drop before you head outdoors to help keep your eyes moisturized. A lubricating eye drop also can be used after you have been exposed to irritants to flush out the eyes and restore lost moisture.

According to The Schepens Eye Research Institute, dry eye is a common condition that affects an estimated 10 million people in the United States. Symptoms such as scratchy, itchy, burning, sore or

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bloodshot eyes and excessive tearing are not only uncomfortable, they also can interfere with vision and damage eye tissue if left untreated.

Dry eye is often caused by exposure to extreme environmental conditions including a dry environment, a harsh cold environment, as well as aging and certain medications. In addition, dry eye can result from exposure to cigarette smoke, smog and pollution.

“Many of my patients complain of dry and irritated eyes, especially those patients who work outdoors or spend extended periods of time outdoors for leisure,” said James H. Peace, M.D., clinical professor at UCLA. “I often recommend that my patients use a lubricating eye drop like GenTeal artificial tears to help keep their eyes moisturized.”

Lubricating eye drops, also called artificial tears, are available without a prescription in most major drug stores. Unlike eye drops that are designed to reduce redness, artificial tears are made specifically to lubricate the eyes and minimize the irritation caused by dryness, as well as protect against further irritation.

To reduce your risk for dry eye, avoid dry environments and eye irritants such as dust, pollen and tobacco smoke. Limit consumption of sodas, alcohol and coffee, which usually contain caffeine. Blink more frequently. Increase humidity at home and work. Remove contact lenses when traveling by air. Use lubricating eye drops, especially at bedtime.

For more information on dry eye, visit: www.gentel.com.