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Eclipse and Eye Safety

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Eclipse and Eye Safety
By Marvel Davis and Jessica Donahue

Introduction
Eclipses occur due to the periodic alignments of the earth, moon, and sun. Solar eclipses happen when the moon moves between the earth and the sun. This occurrence is rare due to the angle and tilt of the earth and moon changing all the time. However, when it does occur the moon produces two shadows, one called the umbra shadow, which is relatively small, and a second one called the penumbra, which is much larger. The umbra occurs when the eclipse is in totality and it completely blocks out the sun making it safe to view without special glasses, while the penumbra is the partial eclipse where some of the sun's damaging light is allowed to pass through, special glasses must be worn at this time. (1)

Sun Warning
It is never safe to look directly at the sun, even if the sun is partially obscured. The only safe way to view the sun in its un-eclipsed or partially eclipsed state is to use special safety glasses made specifically for viewing the sun. Homemade filters or regular sunglasses, even if very dark, are not enough protection to view the sun without injury. Sun viewing glasses need to meet the ISO 12312-2 International standard for sun viewing. (2,3) Failure to wear adequate eye wear can result in permanent eye damage or blindness. (4)

Safe Viewing
There are two types of eye damage caused by sun exposure: Short-term and Long-term damage. This damage results from an exorbitant amount of ultraviolet light hitting the retina. Short-term damage is caused by staring at the sun, while long-term damage can occur from a lifetime of sun exposure. Permanent damage to the retina can occur within approximately 100 seconds. This is called solar retinopathy. (6,3)

Solar Retinopathy
Solar retinopathy occurs when eyes are overexposed to the sun, it destroys the cones and rods in the eye creating small blind spots. (8) Since there are no pain receptors in the retina there are no symptoms associated with retinal damage until vision is impaired. (6)

Do’s and Don’ts
- **DO NOT** use scratched glasses as they can let unfiltered light through to your eyes.
- **DO NOT** view the sun through an unfiltered camera, telescope or other such device - the light becomes concentrated and can burn your eyes even through special glasses.
- **DO NOT** look directly at the sun, it WILL damage your eyes permanently.
- **DO NOT** use homemade devices to filter the sun, specialty glasses are a must.
- **DO** wear safety glasses the entire time the sun is in Partial eclipse.

Sources

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