

What, exactly, are you supposed to do about sunscreen in your eye?

Korin Miller

YAHOO!
Writer

Yahoo Lifestyle July 2, 2018, 4:38 PM GMT

It's pretty much a given that when you get sunscreen in your eye, it's going to hurt ... a lot.

Busy Philipps knows the feeling: She's on vacation and just posted about her own sunscreen-in-eye experience on Instagram, alongside a photo of herself squinting in pain. "I'll never get used to the sweat/sunscreen in my eye one/two punch," she wrote in the caption.



If you wear sunscreen, it's pretty likely that this has happened to you a few times, or at least enough to know that you don't want to go through this again if you can help it.

Getting sunscreen in your eye stings so intensely simply because the ingredients in the product are irritating, **Gary Goldenberg, MD**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, tells Yahoo Lifestyle. Unfortunately, that's true whether you use a physical blocker (which works by

sitting on top of your skin), a chemical sunscreen (which creates a chemical reaction and changes UV rays into heat), or a combination of the two, he says. “Preservatives, active ingredients in the sunscreen itself, and zinc oxide can irritate the eyes.”

The lotion “completely disrupts your tear film,” Michael J. Earley, doctor of optometry and associate dean of academic affairs at the Ohio State University College of Optometry, explains to Yahoo Lifestyle, which is why you can have a stinging, burning sensation that seems to continue. That causes your eye to dry out and get irritated. “You then have to try to get that tear chemistry back to its normal levels,” Earley says.

If you’re at home and have access to artificial tears, Earley recommends rinsing your eye out with that. This can do two things: It helps get the sunscreen out of your eye and also restores your tear film.

If you’re at the beach and don’t have easy access to artificial tears, Earley suggests briefly washing your eye with water, such as from a drinking fountain. It’s also important to clean your eyelashes, since they can hold on to the sunscreen and keep spreading it over your eyes when you blink, he says. You don’t want to wash with water for too long (i.e., no more than a minute): The water itself can also mess with your tear quality and dry out your eyes, Earley says.

If you wear contacts, it’s a good idea to take them out and rinse them well with solution when you can. There’s no need to pitch them, unless they continue to bother you once they’re cleaned, Earley says.

There are a few things you can do to lower the odds that this will happen to you in the future. If you know you’re going to be sweating while you wear sunscreen, it’s a good idea to use a product that says it’s “sweat proof.” Fragrance-free sunscreens may also be less irritating, Goldenberg says. Whatever you do, don’t stop wearing sunscreen around your eyes — just be careful about where you put it, he says. And, of course, be careful not to rub your eyes after you’ve applied the sunscreen.

None of this is a guarantee that you’ll never go through this experience again, but it should drastically decrease the time you’re feeling discomfort.