

Sports Success STARTS IN THE EXAM CHAIR



COURTESY OF LIBERTY SPORT



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By Taylor Benton and Alexandria Wiss, OD

As advocates for our patient's visual health, we need to know about many facets of their life—diet, medical history and daily habits. The last item is one of interest, particularly in terms of time outside in the sun and playing sports. Too often patients consider protecting their bones and not their eyes, yet the eyes are often the most vulnerable part of the body when playing sports.

Patients in need of vision correction can be especially risky when playing sports. Glasses do not provide enough protection for the eyes, and not all lenses are impact resistant. Patients with correction needs can get prescription goggles specially fitted for certain sports such as swimming or skiing. Eyewear protection is recommended for athletes even if they don't need vision correction—any contact sport or sport with the risk of a flying projectile should require vision protection. Examples of sports that people often don't think of as needing protection include bicycling, where rocks could “kick up”

into one's eye, or beach volleyball, where sand and sun are risks to the eye.

Vision protection in sports has many more options than simply a helmet or a pair of goggles. First, patients and doctors should ensure that all sports protective eyewear meet the impact standards of the American Standards for Testing and Materials (ASTM). Patients who choose to wear glasses while playing sports should use polarized glasses or lenses with anti-reflective coating to reduce glare and visual fatigue. Color-tinting of lenses can add greater clarity and contrast to equipment and field conditions. Photochromic lenses that adjust tinting for both indoor and outdoor wear are beneficial for people who play outdoor sports in the daytime. Anti-fog coating can be helpful for goggles used for swimming, basketball, skiing and other sports. No matter the sport, there is a technology that can assist in wearing glasses while playing.

In addition to protecting the eyes from sports injuries, optometrists play a role in concussion prevention and treatment. Helmets should be worn during practice for contact sports as well as during games. If a player

sustains a concussion, an optometrist should be part of the follow-up appointments to monitor vision changes and any long-lasting effects.

Optometrists should be at the forefront of every athlete's visual needs as we can not only prescribe acuity correction but can play a role in understanding and improving an athlete's tracking, focusing, periphery and eye-hand coordination, among other visual abilities. The best way to learn more about your patients' sports participation is through the annual eye exam, which is why the Think About Your Eyes campaign plays a vital role in sports vision safety. Raising awareness of this basic health check-up opens the door to a bigger role in the patient's vision health practices and protecting it for years to come. ■

Taylor Benton, sports vision therapist, and Alexandria Wiss, OD, practice at Hellerstein & Brenner Vision Center PC. They are members of the Colorado Optometric Association and one of the 24,000 doctors listed on the Think About Your Eyes online locator. First Vision Media Group is a media partner of Think About Your Eyes.