

DIY EYE SAFETY

Twenty thousand people suffer serious eye injuries as a result of DIY accidents every year. Many of these accidents lead to the loss of an eye or permanent blindness. So it's crucial to know how to stop accidents and what to do when one happens.

Looking after your eyes

It's surprising what little people do to protect their eyes. Unlike teeth, eyes rarely let you know if anything is wrong. Change happens so slowly that you are often unaware of it.

Even the smallest change to your eyesight affects how you handle the sharp and potentially dangerous tools used in DIY. Therefore, it's vital to have regular eye examinations. One examination every two years is a sensible precaution.

Many DIYers are around the age of 45, the time when presbyopia begins to take hold. This condition makes it increasingly difficult to read instructions or focus on close-up work unless the required glasses are worn.

Colour vision deficiency (CVD) and DIY

Colour is relevant to many aspects of everyday life, including DIY. You must know if you have problems before starting any job. This usually means having an eye examination that includes a colour vision test. CVD results from a faulty mechanism in the retina. You cannot restore the lost sensation or appreciation of colour.

Some people find limited help identifying certain colours they would otherwise misname through a small red or red-mauve filter of transparent plastic or glass held in front of the eye. A red tinted contact lens can be worn in one eye to aid colour recognition, but the results cannot be guaranteed. The best advice is to check whether a job involves any colours that are a problem to you. If it does, get someone else to do the job or ask for assistance.

Prevention is better than blindness

DIY is one of Britain's fastest growing leisure activities. Millions of people choose to paint, decorate or fix the car rather than pay for expert assistance. However, with DIY responsible for one injury every 25 minutes, people should make sure they are protected before starting any job.

Often DIYers use either inadequate eye protection or, worse still, none at all. Others suffer permanent blindness or the loss of an eye through needlessly removing their eye protection.

Know your limitations

Many injuries come from people thinking they can do something they cannot. Ask yourself whether you can do the job before you start. Anyone can fix a plug or bang a nail into a wall but plumbing and electrical work often require expert advice. If in doubt, call a professional.

If you can do the job, assess what risks and hazards exist before starting. This is crucial in deciding what eye protection to wear.

One size does not fit all

The temptation in DIY is to assume that one set of eye protection covers every job. The truth is that, although this approach may cost you less, it will do more harm than good.

Regardless of what you do, protective eyewear must be worn. This does not mean normal prescription spectacles or contact lenses. Safety spectacles must be worn over your normal vision correction.

Make sure your protection conforms to European Standard BSEN 166. The CE Mark indicates that the product can be sold within the European Union. However, BSEN 166 indicates that it meets tough, Europe-wide standards.

If you are welding, you need a special mask and spectacles that meet British Standard BS1542. Any job, such as masonry, which generates dust, requires a dust mask for the whole face.

If you are tackling a job involving chemical hazards, box type chemical goggles or hoods are essential. If it is tricky, you may need a full face-piece respirator.

Many injuries come from mechanical jobs, such as grinding, which generate small, high velocity particles like dust or splinters. These can get through poor eye protection. Wearing safety spectacles with side shields or goggles with box and cup or face shields reduces the likelihood of this happening.

Your DIY shop or optometrist will help you decide what to wear. If in doubt, ask for advice. Prescription safety spectacles are also available for people who find wearing additional eyewear a problem.

Protect and survive

Any damage to your eye protection increases the chance of an eye injury, so it must be able to withstand being hit by an object. Spectacles with polycarbonate lenses or side shields are considerably tougher than normal vision correction.

Many eye injuries stem from people lifting their eye protection during a job. So keep it on at all times. If you must lift it, stop what you are doing.

Children can be a big hazard. It's crucial to keep them at a safe distance. If they want to know more, stop doing the job while you tell them about it. Only let them help if they are fully protected and will not hinder you.

Protecting your protection

Check your protection before and after every job. Clean lenses and frames and replace scratched or cracked ones immediately. You should store all eye protection in a protective container when not in use.

Make sure your protection fits. Eye protection should fit firmly but not tightly, sitting close to your eyes without the eyelashes touching the lens. Never use friends' equipment – it fits them, not you.

What to do if something goes wrong:

Before you start, make sure you have first aid equipment and eyewash, you know where it is stored and it is easily to hand in case of an accident.

Do not rub the eye. This will make matters worse, increasing the chance of blindness or the loss of an eye.

Get medical attention as quickly as possible. Getting to a hospital may save your sight. Call an ambulance or get someone to drive you there.

Never wash a cut or punctured eye. Cuts should be bandaged lightly if possible. Abrasions will need hospital treatment with drops, ointments and a sterile pad over the eye for at least 24 hours. Lacerations are far more painful and may require drug therapy, eye ointment and stitching of any torn tissue.