



CHOOSING THE RIGHT SUNGLASS FRAME

BY GARY HEITING, OD

Though the quality of sunglasses usually is determined by the absorptive characteristics of the lenses, the most important factors in people's satisfaction with their sunglasses typically are the comfort, fit and appearance of the frame.

After all, people can't feel if their sunglasses are protecting their eyes from the sun's harmful UV and high energy visible (HEV) radiation, but they sure can feel if the frame is uncomfortable or not fitting properly.

And frame selection is even more important for people who need prescription sunglasses, since these patients sometimes have fewer choices in frame styles and features than people who can wear nonprescription models, due to factors related to the corrective power of their lenses.

A COMFORTABLE, SECURE FIT

To keep your patients happy, remember these basics of a good sunglasses fit:

Bridge

Choose a frame with a bridge that provides maximum contact area with both sides of the nose without pinching it. The greater the contact area, the more stable and comfortable the fit.

Also, the bridge should position the frame so the wearer's pupil is centered vertically within the lens opening. You might have to bend this rule a bit for oversized fashion frames, but in general, the closer you can come to this alignment the better—for both appearance and optical performance.

Frame Size

Choose a frame with an eyesize large enough to provide full coverage of the eyes from the sun. It should fit close to the brow at the top, but not so close that the wearer's eyelashes touch the back of the lenses.

A wraparound style will provide extra protection from sunlight, but be aware that frame wrap and pupil decentration affect optical performance. Ask your lab for guidance about this—especially for higher prescriptions.

Another way to limit sun exposure from the side is to choose frames with wide temples. To assess the width of the frame, view it from above to make sure there is adequate clearance between the temples and the sides of the wearer's head.

Temple Length and Style

For frames with temples designed to bend behind the ears, make sure there is adequate temple length to position the bend at the appropriate position, with enough temple behind the ear to adjust for a secure fit.

For frames with straight temples, make sure there is adequate tension to hold the frame securely. This is accomplished with sufficient touch of the temples to the side of the head beyond the top of the ears, with minimal/no touch of the temples to the side of the head in front of the ears. This will provide a secure fit, especially when the wearer is perspiring.

THE BEST SHAPE

Use the same guidelines for selecting sunglass frame shapes that you use to help people choose the most attractive eyeglasses for the shape of their face. Remember that the most flattering frames complement and balance the wearer's face shape, not mimic it.

For round faces, choose rectangular frame shapes; for faces with sharp angles, consider oval and rounded shapes first.

MATERIALS MATTER

For sports sunglasses in particular, the right frame materials are essential for both fit and function.

If the sunglasses are for sports and active wear, make sure both the lenses and frames are lightweight and impact resistant. For lenses, Phoenix and polycarbonate are best. For frames, choose durable models made of hypoallergenic plastics or metals (titanium, for example), with safety features such as spring hinges.

For hard-to-fit faces, consider frames with adjustable, non-slip silicone nose pads.

SHOW YOU CARE

Taking time to educate your patients about factors that affect the comfort and quality of sunglasses is a great way to showcase your eyewear knowledge and dispensing skills and increase their satisfaction with their eyewear purchase.

Gary Heiting, OD, has more than 20 years experience as a clinical optometrist.

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