



Eye Safety at Home

By Jonna Jefferis

It was one of those assemble-at-home bookcases that are so much less expensive than what you find in furniture stores—a good deal, thought Kevin.

On his kitchen floor, he laid out the instruction sheet, back panel, wood shelves, pegs and screws. Although the manufacturer claimed that no power tools were needed, Kevin found a hole that was too tiny for the screws provided. He would have to use his drill. “I knew this was too good to be true,” he muttered on his way to the garage.

In the garage Kevin made an understandable but costly mistake. With only one hole to drill and not remembering where his safety goggles were, he made the decision not to look for them. Kevin might have to spend more time searching for the goggles than wearing them, he reasoned. Back in the kitchen, as the whining drill made contact with the shelf, it propelled a wood splinter into Kevin’s right eye, causing sudden, sharp pain and temporary vision loss.

“ Nearly half of the 2.5 million reported eye injuries suffered annually by Americans happen in and around the home. ”

More than 40 percent of eye injuries occur during such everyday activities as cooking, home repairs or gardening. Of those injured, 50,000 experience significant vision loss.

Like Kevin, you probably feel safe in your own home, and you are—if you take proper safety precautions. Many of us don’t often consider the possibility of eye injury around the house. An American Academy of Ophthalmology survey revealed that fewer than one in five Americans believes that he or she is at even a moderate risk.

Most are aware of hazards associated with construction sites and manufacturing plants, and in the 1990s, the majority of eye accidents did occur in the workplace. Today the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) requires workers to wear safety eyewear in all areas where

eyes are at risk. These measures have decreased the number of such accidents in the workplace. In the home, however, eye injuries have become more frequent.

Experts partially attribute increasing at-home eye injuries to a growing trend by thrift-driven homeowners to tackle repair projects themselves, instead of hiring outside professionals. Unfortunately, without the advantage of the safety oversight that OSHA provides to employers, these do-it-yourselfers may be unaware of their risks of eye damage.

Any home project that involves car repair, working with wood, metal or chemicals, using a lawnmower or power tools requires protective eyewear, which can prevent 90 percent of eye injuries. Polycarbonate is the most common lens material used in protective eyewear, as it is up to 10 times more impact-resistant than the plastic used in standard lenses.

This eyewear is available in most hardware stores, and should be approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Look for the ANSI “Z87” qualifying mark on the product. Choose eyewear with a snug wrap-around frame to protect eyes from flying grass clippings, chemical splashes, splinters or other tiny particles.

Protective eyewear is not required for every job at home, of course, but awareness and care always are. Whether you’re doing yard work, using a spray cleaner or frying eggs on the stove, be cautious.

“Preventing an eye injury is much easier than treating one,” said H. Dunbar Hoskins Jr., MD, executive vice president of AAO. “People need to be aware of the everyday dangers that lurk in the home.”

Your sight is precious; protect it.

Sources: American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Society of Ocular Trauma, Occupational Health and Safety Administration

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