

How to Choose Sunglasses

If you enjoy spending time outdoors, you need a quality pair of sunglasses. Sunglasses protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays, they make it easier for you to see where you're going and they protect you from possible injury caused by flying debris and other hazards.



QUICK READ

1. Choose the sunglasses to suit the sport.
2. Know the differences between the various materials and construction methods used.
3. Fit is key.
4. To polarize or not to polarize? Read below to know what works best when.

Consider Your Plans

Different sunglasses provide different types and different levels of protection. To find a pair that's right for you, begin by considering:

- The kinds of activities you have planned—will you be driving, paddling, climbing, fishing, skiing?
- Your destinations—will you be using them on the water, on the road, in the woods, at high-altitude?
- Your budget.

Make Some Basic Decisions

- **Lens Material**

The material your sunglass lenses are made out of will affect their clarity, weight, durability and cost.

- **Glass**—Glass lenses provide excellent clarity and the best scratch-resistance of all lens materials. However, they're heavier and more expensive than other options.
- **Polycarbonate**—Advances in manufacturing technology have resulted in polycarbonate lenses that are not only very affordable, but also amazingly clear. The combination of impact resistance, light weight and low bulk make them an excellent choice for a wide variety of activities.
- **Acrylic**—Acrylic is a tough, extremely affordable plastic alternative to polycarbonate. It provides less optical clarity and durability than the 2 options listed above, and can cause some image distortion. But it's perfect if you only use your sunglasses a few times a year or if you need an inexpensive, temporary replacement pair.
- **Removable Lenses**—Some styles come with removable lenses that can be swapped out and replaced with lenses of other colors. These interchangeable systems allow you to tailor your sunglass protection to best match your activities and the current weather conditions. Consider one of these interchangeable systems if you need reliable performance in a wide variety of activities and conditions.

- **Lens Color (Tint)**

In general, sunglass lenses are tinted to cut down on overall brightness. But different tint colors can have different effects on your vision. The specific lens color you choose will affect 1) how much visible light reaches your eyes, 2) how well you see other colors, and 3) how well you see contrasts.

- **Brown/gray/green**—Brown, gray and green lenses are color-neutral, which means they cut down on overall brightness without distorting colors. These darker shades are intended primarily to cut through the glare and reduce eye strain in moderate-to-bright conditions.
- **Yellow/gold/amber**—Yellow, gold and amber lenses provide less overall brightness protection, but excel in moderate-to-low level light conditions. They provide excellent depth perception, which makes them perfect for skiing, snowboarding and other snow sports. They also enhance contrasts in tricky, flat light conditions.
- **Rose/vermilion**—Rose- and vermilion-colored glasses really do make the world seem brighter. They provide excellent low-light visibility and enhance contrast (perfect for skiing and snowboarding in cloudy conditions). They also enhance the visibility of objects against blue and green backgrounds, which makes them perfect for driving or exploring in forested areas.
- **Mirrored Coatings**—Mirrored coatings are reflective films applied to the outside surfaces of some sunglass lenses. They help reduce glare by reflecting much of the light that hits the surface of the lens. Mirrored coatings make objects appear darker than they are, so they're most

appropriate in bright situations.

Make Sure You Have Adequate Protection

• Light Transmission

All sunglasses block some visible light, but different styles provide different levels of protection. The amount of light that actually reaches your eye will be affected by the color and thickness of your lenses, the material they're made out of and the coatings they have on them.

- Most all-purpose sunglasses let in approximately 15-25% of all visible light. Aim for glasses in this range if you need a pair for everyday uses and basic recreational activities.
- Glacier glasses (special sunglasses designed specifically to protect your eyes from the intense light at high altitudes) let in only 4-10%. Most glacier glasses also have side shields to protect you from light sneaking in from the sides of your lenses. Because of their low light transmission, glacier glasses should not be used for driving or other everyday activities.
- Photochromic lenses automatically adjust to changing light intensities to protect you in a wider range of conditions. These lenses actually get darker (to block more light) when things get brighter outside, and lighter when conditions get darker.

• UV Protection

Invisible ultra-violet (UV) rays can seriously damage your eyes, leading to cataracts, cancer and/or degenerative diseases of your retinas and eye muscles.

UV protection information should be printed on the hangtag or price sticker of any sunglasses you buy, no matter where you buy them. If it isn't, find a different pair. Also keep in mind that cheap, tinted sunglasses with little or no UV protection can actually do more harm than good, causing your eye lenses to open up wider, leaving them even more vulnerable to UV rays.

Kids' eyes are especially vulnerable to UV light, since they don't have the same level of natural protection as adults.

At REI, we understand how important it is to protect your eyes from the sun's harmful UV rays. So all of the sunglasses that we sell block 100% of harmful UV light.

• Polarization

Polarized lenses are a great choice for skiers, drivers and people who enjoy water sports. Polarized lenses have a special filter built into them that blocks flat, reflected light (off of snow, water, glass).

These filters also optimize true colors, giving you a clearer view of the world around you no matter how bright or hazy it gets.

Keep in mind, however, that polarized lenses reduce contrast between objects, which can be a hindrance in low-light conditions or when enjoying fast-paced activities like snowboarding, skiing, or driving.

Find a Pair That Fits

• Lens Shape

There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to choosing the right lens shape. But there are a few general rules that can help if you don't know where to start.

There are 4 basic face shapes; oval, square, triangular and round. Oval faces look good in just about any lens shape.

Square faces have high temples, and look good with rounded lenses to soften shape contours. Triangular (or heart-shaped) faces look good in frames that flare out toward the cheeks. Round faces are complimented by square frames, which lengthen and slim down the face lines.

Lenses that wrap around your face block more of the light hitting your eyes from the side, and they also improve aerodynamics, cutting down on wind that can dry your eyes out. Wrap-around lenses also provide extra protection against rain, pebbles, sand and so on.

• Frame Material

Metal frames are easy to adjust to your specific face and head shape. Nylon frames are not adjustable (unless they have an internal, adjustable wire core), but they tend to be more durable and less expensive. Different manufacturers use different brand names for their frame nylons, including Grilamid, O Matter(TM) and Zyl. Acetate is a form of plastic very similar to nylon in weight, feel and function.

• Hinges

On less expensive glasses, hinge pieces are typically molded right out of the frame material. This keeps costs down, but results in less durable glasses. Higher-quality frames use durable nickel-silver hinges to stand up to more use and abuse. Special "spring hinges" are also available, which allow frame pieces

to bend and flex more than regular frames.

- **Testing for Fit**

It's important that you find a pair of sunglasses that fits you comfortably. Look for frames that grab you securely and fit snugly on your nose and ears, but that don't pinch or rub. Make sure the weight of your sunglasses is evenly distributed between your ears and nose. Opt for lightweight frames whenever possible to avoid excess friction on these contact points.

If you choose metal or wire-core frames, you may be able to (carefully!) bend the frames to fit your face more comfortably. You may also be able to adjust the nose pieces to grab your nose more comfortably.

[Previous Page](#)

[Close](#)