

EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

Year End Reminders for A Safe and Comfortable New Year

Hope you enjoyed Monday night's lunar eclipse as much as I did. The next one like that won't come around for another 84 years and I doubt if I'll be around to enjoy it. What a spectacular way to end the year.

As we turn the final page on the 2010 calendar and look forward to an exciting start for 2011, I would like to use this column to highlight some practical and hopefully useful tidbits from the previous year's columns.

Everyone is making plans this weekend to toast the New Year and there are a few risks that need to be accounted for. As I mentioned before, let's be careful out there. Little Johnny got his Red Ryder air rifle and so far has not shot his eye out or the eye of any one of his close relatives. At least no one has called me about what to do for that kind of injury. So remember when you pop the cork on that special bottle of bubbly whether it be vintage champagne or sparkling grape juice, aim at the ceiling. Grandma's chandelier will handle the impact of that high velocity cork much better than your sweetheart's eye. No, I don't think it its necessary to wear safety glasses; just practice safe cork popping procedures (say that three times really fast sober or impaired).

It is officially Winter and that means colder weather. Cold air means dry air and more problems for my dry eye patients. Remember that the cold dry outside air will be heated up by your furnace or heat pump and dried out even more as it is blown into your home. That's why your furniture falls apart and your eyes feel worse. You'll need to use those artificial tears more often and that tip about using flax oil is even more relevant now. The only really effective way to enhance the relative humidity in your home is by using a whole house humidifier system that attaches to your furnace. Room humidifiers are okay in a closed room like the bedroom but, they just aren't reliable to moisturize the air throughout the home. A relative humidity of 40% to 50% is essential to keep the eyes comfortable and the furniture in good repair this time of year. (For all you practical jokers out there, the drier the air the greater the static electrical spark you can generate).

The sun is also much brighter this time of year because the earth is the closest it will be to the sun at any time during the year. Yeah, I know you're asking me why is it so cold if we're closer to the fire? Well I won't go into a big discussion about precession, perihelion and angular axis etc; just trust me when I tell you that this means a more concentrated UV assault on the earth and your eyes. We know that UV radiation is one of the big reasons why we get cataracts and macular degeneration so when you're outside UV blocking sunglasses are always important. Reflected UV radiation off the surface of the water or off of the beautiful white stuff we see so little of around here multiplies the damaging effects of UV to the eyes. So wear your sunglasses when outdoors and make sure the little tag hanging from the bridge of your fancy designer sunglasses says 100% UVA and UVB blocking protection.

Have a safe and Happy New Year celebration and I wish for every one of you a prosperous and healthy year throughout 2011.

If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at doctom@tdkj.com and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.