

Put on a Coat

When it comes to choosing eyewear, the coating you choose – or don't choose – for your lenses can make a big difference in your satisfaction with your new glasses. Optometrist Dr. Mel Gehrig with The Eye Clinic and Optics Unlimited says lens coatings can enhance both the performance and appearance of eyeglass lenses. "There are many options for lens coatings, and the type you choose should be based on your lifestyle – what you do and how you need your glasses to help you achieve optimum vision in different situations."

Dr. Gehrig provides an overview of some of the more common coating options and their purpose.

Scratch-Resistance Coating

Dr. Gehrig says while no lens material, including glass, is scratch-proof, a lens can be treated to make it very resistant to scratching. "Without this protection, most lenses will accumulate scratches, whether it's from dropping them, something hitting them, or even cleaning with the wrong type of cloth. A clear, hard coating applied to the front and back of lenses will provide protection from the daily wear-and-tear that can scratch the lens surface."

Most types of plastic lenses today already include scratch-resistant coatings, but Dr. Gehrig says it's still important to let your optician know you want this feature for your eyewear. She adds that it is highly recommended for all children's glasses.

Anti-Reflective (AR) Coating

AR Coatings are applied to improve both the vision through the lenses and the appearance of the glasses. AR coatings are similar to the coatings found on microscopes and camera lenses. They consist of several layers of metal oxides applied to the front and back lens surfaces. Because of the layering effect, AR coatings sometimes have a hint of green or purple color, depending on the individual manufacturer's formula.

Dr. Gehrig explains that each layer is scientifically calculated to block reflected light in order to reduce glare, annoying reflections and halos around lights. "This makes AR coating a great safety benefit for those who drive frequently at night."

AR coating also reduces both internal and external reflections on the lenses themselves, eliminating the negative impact eyewear can have on the eye's appearance. "Internal reflections appear as rings that make lenses look thick, and external reflections mask your eyes from a clear, complete view when someone is looking at you," says Dr. Gehrig. "But with an AR coating, eyeglass lenses appear thin or non-existent, and your eyes look more natural. This is why, from a cosmetic point of view, everyone with glasses would benefit from an AR coating. It is especially important for those with a strong prescription. The AR coating can be used in conjunction with high-index lenses to make even thick glasses look and feel as thin as possible."

For sunwear, AR coatings are handled a little differently. "Because sunglasses are so dark, an AR coating on the front can look smudged and blotchy," says Dr. Gehrig. "That is why we typically only apply the AR coating to the back surface of the lens on sunglasses. This helps reduce the reflections of light that enter from behind and bounce off the surface into your eyes."

Ultraviolet (UV) Coating

Just as we use sunscreen to keep the sun's UV rays from harming our skin, a UV coating to eyeglass lenses protects the eyes from those same damaging rays. Overexposure to ultraviolet light is a contributing factor for cataracts, retinal damage and other eye problems

Dr. Gehrig says the UV coating is simple and quick to apply to most plastic eyeglass lenses, and it does not change the appearance of the lenses at all. "The one exception to our recommendation for UV coating is polycarbonate lenses, which already have UV protection built into the lens material."

Mirror Coatings

Just as the name suggests, a mirror coating is highly reflective. In contrast to anti-reflective coatings, which are very clear, mirror coatings (sometimes called flash coatings) are available in a variety of colors. Dr. Gehrig says this coating technology has advanced since first introduced, and what was once limited to the plain "mirror" look, is now available in a wide variety of colors, in addition to the metallic silver, gold and copper.

Only those looking at the person wearing the glasses can see the color of the mirror coating, the person wearing the glasses won't even notice a difference in their vision. "Mirror coatings are purely cosmetic and are generally applied over sunglass-dark lenses," says Dr. Gehrig. The goal of this highly reflective flash coating is to prevent others from seeing the eyes of the wearer. This has made them a favorite for many law enforcement officers."

For more information about lens coatings, call or stop by the nearest Optics Unlimited in Lake Charles, Sulphur, DeRidder or Jennings.