

# Be sure eye doctor shines a light on night blindness

"Night blindness" can be frightening and dangerous if you are driving. But avoiding travel is no solution. Get your eyes checked.

There are numerous causes for the condition, which is the inability to see well in low light or at night. It is not actually blindness at night.

Called nyctalopia, night blindness a symptom which may be caused by a myriad of eye or medical problems, including some serious diseases, said ophthalmologist Rainna Bahadur, M.D., a partner at Eye Associates of the South.

They have clinics with optical shops in Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gulfport.

Night blindness may be caused by such diseases or disorders as: nearsightedness, cataracts, glaucoma (or glaucoma medications that constrict pupils), diabetes, retinitis pigmentosa, keratoconus, hereditary disease, reaction to certain drugs, or lack of vitamin A, according to the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) and other sources.

To diagnose the cause, an ophthalmologist will perform a comprehensive eye exam, which may include other tests, Bahadur said.

There's also a temporary sort of "night blindness" caused by



**Rainna Bahadur, M.D.**

prolonged exposure to bright light.

"In the summertime, people may notice temporary night blindness one night but not others. This can be caused by prolonged exposure to sunlight without good sunglasses protection, which results in poorer night vision that evening," said Debra LaPrad, M.D., also an ophthalmologist with Eye Associates of the South. "If better sunglasses for daytime don't remedy the problem, see an eye doctor."

If you spend days outdoors and often drive at night, such as on vacation, it would be wise to invest in a pair of polarized wraparound sunglasses to mini-

mize your eyes' sun exposure. Be sure they have 100% UVA and UVB protection, which also may be indicated as "UV 400," she added.

The longer eyes are exposed to sunlight, the longer they need to recover. That may be just a few seconds if you enter a dark room from daylight.

Studies show, 10 days on the beach with bright sun exposure and poor or no sunglasses can cause up to 50 percent (temporary) loss of night vision. Being in bright sunlight for just a few hours reduces eyes' ability to fully adapt to darkness by 10-to-25 minutes.

Although wearing red-tinted sunglasses are poor for driving,



**Debra LaPrad, M.D.**

since they can alter the colors on traffic lights and signs, some people such as pilots wear them for 30 minutes before working in low light to help their eyes adjust more efficiently, various sources said.

If your eye doctor finds you have night blindness not caused by temporary exposure to bright light, appropriate treatment could range from new eyeglasses to cataract surgery to vitamin supplements, Bahadur said. Vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children worldwide.

To contact Eye Associates of the South, call 396-5185 or visit [www.2020view.com](http://www.2020view.com).