

## Eyesight and Nutrition

By Brandie Shaw

Ever since we were children, our mothers have encouraged us to eat our fruits and vegetables. The Food and Drug Administration also suggests that we eat five portions a day. Most people realize that eating nutritious foods will help them fight off disease, lower cholesterol and improve their skin. But they may not realize that a nutritious diet can also have a big impact on their vision.

More than 22 million Americans have cataracts, and another nine million have age-related macular degeneration. These are the two leading causes of vision loss in adults. Some research suggests that increased intake of certain vitamins can slow the advance of both of these conditions. There are two categories of nutrients that have been researched.

Antioxidants such as zinc and vitamins A, C and E are believed to help maintain cells and tissues in all organs, including the eye. Antioxidants help our body to defend itself from free radicals. Smokers are three times more likely to suffer from macular degeneration than non-smokers because smoking encourages free radicals.

A combination of zinc and vitamins A, C and E, called the AREDS formula, can be found in many health food stores. It has been used to help treat moderate and advanced cases of AMD.

Carotenoids are the other main category of nutrients. This group includes beta-carotene, lycopene, lutein and zeaxanthin. Carotenoids can be found in colorful fruits and vegetables such as carrots, red peppers and oranges, as well as in green leafy ones such as kale and broccoli. Vitamins C and E and the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin have been found to delay or slow the growth of cataracts.

In studies of these supplements, the doses were much higher than the FDA's recommended daily allowances. It is important to consult a physician before beginning to take them to make sure there will be no side effects or interactions with your prescription medicines. These supplements are not meant to take the place of more conventional eye disease treatments.

A balanced diet is important for maintaining ocular health, as well as overall health. By supplementing your diet with these additional nutrients, you will add an extra line of defense against disease.

Lutein & Zeaxanthin	Absorb blue light, slow progression of cataracts, support macular cells health
Beta carotene	Absorbs blue light, improves night vision
Zinc	Improves night vision, increases immunity
Vitamins A, C & E	Strengthen defenses against free radicals

Sources: Prevent Blindness America, National Eye Institute, Archives of Ophthalmology