

Oh, Say Can You See?

Part 2 of a two-part series on key nutrients for healthy eyes

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There are at least a dozen good ocular studies which continue to suggest that certain nutrients may play important roles in keeping your eyes in optimal condition as you age. Based on these studies certain vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, herbs, plant pigments and dietary fats are taking center stage to make better sense of the complexities of eye disease. “According to these studies, the sooner your diet improves and you expose your cells to these key nutrients, the greater chance you have to decrease the risk of developing some of the common age-related ocular diseases such as cataracts and aged-related macular degeneration (ARMD)”, says Dr. Silbernagel, an optometric physician at Oregon Vision Center in Redmond and former assistant professor at LSU Medical Eye Center for 9 years. According to Dr. Silbernagel, “securing vision from the threat of ARMD and cataracts appears to be triggered, in part, by oxidative damage that accumulates over the years, so it stands to reason, then, that the sooner the individual is exposed to a diet rich in antioxidants, the sooner the protection starts to take place”. Research has shown that people with higher intakes of Vitamin C and E along with the carotenoids—particularly lutein and zeaxanthin—have less risk of ARMD and cataracts. However, these nutrients may work collectively rather than individually. For instance, some studies have seen no effect with **individual** supplements of Vitamin E, beta-carotene or lutein. According to a recent study, published in June 2004 in Archives of Ophthalmology, which followed 118,000 middle-aged men and women for 14 years showed that those who ate three or more servings of fruit per day had one-third less risk of developing severe ARMD compared to those who ate less than 1.5 servings a day. Surprisingly, none of the vegetables, antioxidants vitamins (A, C and E) or carotenoids protected against early or severe ARMD. However, I would not stop eating your leafy greens or taking your doctor prescribed vision formula based on one study, but **orange** you glad I told you this, so you can **see** what to concentrate on in your diet for the best vision insurance against ARMD? But don't put your bottle of Vitamin C down because researchers at Tufts and Harvard University who studied nearly 250 women with no history of cataracts found that those who took Vitamin C for at least 10 years were 77% less likely to show the initial signs of cataracts and 83% less likely to have cataracts than those who took no supplemental C. Although scientists are not sure how much Vitamin C is necessary, experts estimate somewhere between 150 – 250 milligrams per day is necessary to saturate the lens tissue for protection.

Zinc, a mineral that serves as an antioxidant precursor, may be a key player safeguarding you against ARMD. In the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), people with early signs of ARMD who took supplemental doses of antioxidants plus zinc significantly lowered their risk of ARMD progression. According to Dr. Silbernagel, “it's very important to note that in the AREDS, the use of supplements showed a decrease risk of progression, a stabilization of the disease, if you will, not a reversal, which is more reason to have a thorough eye exam annually if you are over 50, have a family history of ARMD, smoke cigarettes, have a fair complexion and/or blue eyes”.

Take note, there are two forms of macular degeneration: wet verses dry, which requires special instrumentation to detect and measure. Luckily we in Central Oregon have access to this technology right here in Redmond at The Eye Surgery Institute in Redmond ([www. tesivision.com](http://www.tesivision.com)). “The Eye Surgery Institute (TESI) uses the Fundus camera, which is digital photography specific for the inside of the eye. The technology of this camera detects the wet verses the dry form of macular degeneration, which requires different medical treatment”, according to Dr. Oli, Traustason, M.D., medical director of TESI. According to Dr. Donald Peterson, O.D., clinical director and optometric physician at TESI, states that “the dry form can be responsive to nutritional intervention and can

possibly stabilize the disease from progressing but the wet form requires different medical intervention". Bottom line, see your eye doctor, if you meet those risk factors mentioned above "or if a line of words begin to get wavy", according to Dr. Silbernagel.

Preserving eye sights against the perils of ARMD apparently requires more than antioxidant protection. Scaling back on fat especially saturated and trans fats while upping your omega-3 fatty acids may play the most powerful role fending off vision loss by benefiting blood vessels and membranes of the retina, a conclusion of the new study from Harvard's School of Public Health and the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston. The study reported in December 2003 Archives of Ophthalmology, followed 261 people 60 and older who had signs of ARMD in at least one eye. After five years, nearly 40% progressed to the advanced form of ARMD in part because of the amount and type of fat within their diet. Those who ate the most total fat (averaging 70 grams a day) were nearly three times as likely to progress to advanced ARMD as those consuming the least fat (24 grams a day). The participants who had the highest trans fats (about 4 grams per day), which is typically found in commercial baked products, had double the risk of those getting the least (about ½ grams a day). Nuts and fish lowered the risk of progressing to ARMD by about 40%. Although the biochemical mechanism is unclear, dietary fat may worsen ARMD by promoting plaque build-up in the blood vessels of the eyes.

Our hats off to science as we continue to live and learn because ten years ago we did not have the nutrition scientific studies that are now collectively taking center stage as a strong preventative measure to counter age related eye disease. However, because of this credible science, it seems we can not turn on the T.V. or have a neighbor or friend trying to sell us vision formulas to prevent these age related eye diseases. However, eye disease is very complex and requires more than nutrition to keep these vital organs in check. Eye health needs to be address by your eye doctor, not by TV or multi-level marketers trying to help you spend a buck.

To ask preventative health and nutrition questions visit www.healthtransformations.com and click on "contact Diana" or contact me at 541-610-9586.