

Caring for Your Eyes

Recent studies have shown that certain nutrients can have a positive effect on the wellness of the visual system. Eating broccoli, for instance, not only promotes healthy eating, but also encourages good vision health habits as well.

A 2012 report from the Ocular Nutrition Society listed three nutrients are key to promoting healthy eyes and vision. The three nutrients are:

Omega-3 fatty acids

- Found in fish oils (especially sardines and wild-caught salmon) and flaxseed.

Lutein

- Found in dark green leafy vegetables like spinach and kale, as well as corn and egg yolks. The USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend 4-8 milligrams of Lutein daily. A half-cup serving of cooked spinach provides 6 milligrams.

Zeaxanthin

- Also found in dark green leafy vegetables, corn and orange peppers. The USDA has not established recommendations for the daily of Zeaxanthin.

Both Lutein and Zeaxanthin are a form of Vitamin A and, along with Omega-3 fatty acids, may support a healthy macula, the area of the retina that is responsible for our most accurate vision. They may also reduce the risk of cataracts. Omega-3 fatty acids have also been found to help dry eyes.

Antioxidants Can Slow Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Important research done by the National Eye Institute's The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) found that certain antioxidants can slow the progression of age-related macular degeneration by about 25 percent.

These antioxidants include:

- **Vitamin C** - found in citrus fruits, broccoli, bell peppers and papaya
- **Vitamin E** - found in nuts, fortified cereals and sweet potatoes
- **Vitamin A** (beta-carotene) – found in green leafy vegetables as well as orange and red vegetables.
- **Zinc** – found in oysters, red meat, poultry and seafood

The levels of vitamins and minerals used in the AREDS studies are high and often difficult to obtain from the average diet. Nutritional supplements for eye health are available. Talk to Dr Stern to see which nutritional supplements are best for you.

Health Lifestyle

- See your family physician for regular health exams to check for diabetes and high blood pressure
- Find out if you are at increased risk for eye diseases due to your personal or family health history
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Quit smoking because smokers are a greater risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration

Eye Protection

- Protect your eyes from harmful UV light by wearing UV-blocking sunglasses
- UV rays are associated with cataracts and macular degeneration
- Wear proper safety eyewear when working with tools and playing active sports to prevent eye injuries

Diet and Nutrition

- Several studies have shown the health benefits of a diet rich in anti-oxidants
- Anti-oxidants found in fruits and colorful or dark green vegetables can reduce risk of cataract development
- Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish can reduce the risk of developing macular degeneration
- If you are unable to maintain a healthy diet, there are eye vitamins available to ensure you are getting adequate amounts of nutrients

Regular Eye Exams

- Get your eyes check at least every year
- A comprehensive eye exam can determine your risk for major eye diseases and will ensure your eyeglass or contact lens prescription is up-to-date