

Good nutrition important for eye health as you age

Poor vision has many causes and treatments, and as you grow older, you will likely experience some type of vision loss or reduction in visual performance.

For older adults, bright lights, glare while driving at night and even blindness can dramatically affect quality of life, but the treatment isn't just glasses or a stronger prescription - it's also nutrition and supplementation.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness for Americans older than 60, according to the American Optometric Association. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates 7.3 million people are at substantial risk for vision loss from AMD. Other estimates indicate that as our population continues to rapidly age, as many as one in three could be diagnosed with AMD in the next 20 years.

AMD deteriorates central vision, affecting everything from seeing faces clearly to literally having no central vision at all. Key risk factors for AMD are age, family history, smoking (past or present), low macular pigment, light skin and eyes, obesity and Caucasian women are also at slightly higher risk.

Macular Pigment Optical Density (MPOD) is a brief, non-intrusive exam performed by many optometrists throughout the country, which measures macular pigment in the back of the eye.

Think of macular pigment as "internal sunglasses" for the back of your eye - they absorb harmful blue light that can adversely affect eye health. Internal sunglasses protect the photoreceptors in the back of the eye - specifically the cones, which are responsible for central vision, color, sharpness and sensitivity to bright light, among others. Two key carotenoids, Zeaxanthin (zee-uh-zan-thin) and Lutein, comprise the internal sunglasses, which can become thin as we age, unable to block or absorb harmful blue light. In order to keep the internal sunglasses thick and dense, it is important to replenish Zeaxanthin, the predominant carotenoid in the area where the concentration of cones is the highest.

Zeaxanthin is very scarce in the average daily diet, and vegetables like kale, corn, collard greens, spinach, and peppers naturally provide nutrients to help maintain macular health, but supplementation is often necessary. For example, one would have to eat approximately 20 ears of corn to get a recommended dosage of 8 to 10 milligrams of natural dietary Zeaxanthin per day.

Supplements like the EyePromise brand of eye vitamins help rebuild macular pigment through unique nutritional formulas that feature the highest levels of all natural Zeaxanthin, derived from paprika. In addition to protection, Zeaxanthin and Lutein can improve visual performance, reduce glare issues and sensitivity to bright light, as well as improve color intensity and contrast sensitivity.

"Too often we concentrate our diets on weight, blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure, but ignore one of the most important organs in our bodies - our eyes," says Dr. Dennis Giehart, founder of Zeavision. "An abundance of science has found low macular pigment puts people at risk for AMD, and increasing Zeaxanthin in the diet can help improve macular pigment for improved visual performance."

Vision shouldn't be something you take for granted as you age. Take care of your eyes with proper nutrition and supplementation if necessary, and ask your eye care professional about having your macular pigment measured to maintain your central vision.

