



# Eating for healthy vision

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**Nutrition has a big role** to play in eye health. This is hardly surprising. The nutrients and plant compounds in certain foods help keep eyes functioning well and even prevent problems like cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

About half of us will develop cataracts at some point in our lives, mostly as we get older. This is a clouding of the lens in the eye. Fortunately, correcting cataracts is relatively simple and done as outpatient surgery. Less treatable is AMD, the leading cause of blindness among older people.

What can we do to help ourselves? In short, eat well.

Carrots have always been touted as good for your eyes. It's true. They contain beta carotene which is converted by the body into vitamin A, and vitamin A is great for the eyes. Indeed, a shortage of it can lead to night blindness and other problems.

Other nutrients also protect vision either as antioxidants or in reducing inflammation. These include other carotenoids and antioxidant pigments found in many vegetables and fruits. Two of these nutrients are lutein and zeaxanthin that have been shown to be beneficial to eye health. Both these carotenoids have been shown to reduce the risk of AMD and cataracts.

Vitamins C and E, along with beta carotene and other antioxidants have been shown to be helpful. A British study found that older vegetarians were 30 to 40 percent less likely to develop cataracts compared to meat eaters. But, there is no evidence that antioxidant supplements

do anything to help. In other words, dietary vitamin C and E make a difference that you cannot match with supplements.

Zinc is a mineral essential to vision. It is thought to protect eye tissue from the harmful effects of light and from inflammation. Using supplemental zinc outside diet has never been shown to benefit healthy eyes.

Omega-3 fats (those from fish and seafood) are linked to lower incidence of AMD and a reduction of its progress. It may also protect against cataracts.

Some people turn to herbal supplements. Despite claims, so far there is no convincing evidence that herb or eye supplements can keep eyes healthy.

Research leans heavily to healthy eating as the most helpful for maintaining eye health. It appears that dietary habits that benefit cardiovascular health are also effective for eye health.

The best sources of nutrients for eye, and cardiovascular, health come from colourful vegetables and fruit—think of spin-

ach, carrots, beet, broccoli, blueberries and kale. All of these are loaded with carotenoids. Opt for healthy fats as in those from fish and nuts. And get more zinc, only not from supplements. It's plentiful in meat, seafood and liver.

In other words, eat well and your eyes (and body!) will love you for it.

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