

Foods for Healthier Eyes

Everyone knows that a good diet will help you stay healthy. But eating foods high in certain antioxidants may also help to protect your eyes from reduced vision or even blindness. The antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin are highly concentrated in the pigment of the macula, the light-sensitive cells in the middle of the eye's retina. Some research suggests that a diet rich in those antioxidants may be linked to a lower risk for eye diseases. One recent large study found that people whose diets were high in lutein and zeaxanthin were at lower risk of developing age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and of progression to advanced AMD, the vision-threatening form. Another large study found that people with high lutein and zeaxanthin dietary intake were at lower risk for cataracts.

Lutein and zeaxanthin are found in dark, green leafy vegetables like spinach, kale and collard greens. The yolks of eggs also contain lutein. The antioxidants are also present in yellow and orange vegetables and fruits, like sweet potatoes, carrots and peaches. National health organizations recommend from five to 13 servings of vegetables and fruits per day, depending on age and gender. One serving equals one cup of salad greens, or one half a cup cooked vegetables or cut fruit, or one medium-size piece of fruit, or six ounces of juice.

So far, the jury is still out as to whether high dietary levels or supplements of these substances prevent or just slow the progression of age-related eye diseases. More than one study has shown that vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients found in food offer advantages that are not available in pill form. Still, eating fresh, whole foods supports a person's general health, and taking a balanced multivitamin supplement is usually considered a good general health "insurance" practice.

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