Healthy Living with Macular Degeneration

People who are visually impaired benefit from a healthy lifestyle that contributes to overall well-being. This includes regular exercise—adjusted to ensure safety—and a nutritious diet that may help protect remaining vision.

Healthy Lifestyle, Healthy Eyes

The following suggestions may help protect your vision, improve your overall health, and possibly lower your risk of developing age-related macular degeneration:

- Eat a varied and nutritious diet that includes leafy green vegetables, fruit, fish, and foods containing vitamins D, E, and C, beta carotene, lutein, zeaxanthin, and omega-3 fatty acids. (Read below for more information on healthy “vision” foods.)
- Get regular exercise.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Keep blood pressure at a normal level and control other medical conditions.
- Do not smoke.
- Prevent overexposure to sunlight by wearing wide-brimmed hats and high quality sunglasses that have 99- to 100-percent UVA and UVB protection.
- Regularly visit an eye doctor for comprehensive eye exams.
- Perform Amsler grid tests at home.

“Vision” Foods to Include in Your Diet

- Dark green, yellow, and orange fruits and vegetables. These contain carotenoids, which may defend against a number of medical conditions, including age-related macular degeneration. Lutein and zeaxanthin are two especially important carotenoids related to vision health. They are found in dark, leafy greens such as spinach, collard greens, and kale, as well as in yellow corn, okra, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, mango, green beans, sweet potatoes, lima beans, squash, green, yellow and orange bell pepper, and egg yolks.
- Fruits and vegetables abundant in vitamin C, including green peppers, citrus fruits, tomatoes, broccoli, strawberries, sweet and white potatoes, leafy greens, and cantaloupe.
Eggs, fortified cereals, fruit, wheat germ, green leafy vegetables, nuts, nut oils, vegetable oils, and whole grains. These all contain vitamin E.

Wild salmon, tuna, sardines, walnuts, and flaxseed oil. These are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

Whole grain versions of pasta (sometimes called “brown pasta”), rice, and bread that contain complex carbohydrates, which are metabolized more slowly and are healthier than their “white” counterparts.

White rice, bread, and pasta have a high glycemic index, meaning that the carbohydrates are broken down rapidly into glucose or blood sugar. They provide quick energy but contain few nutrients and little fiber, and in large amounts they may damage cells. Some studies have shown that eating foods with a high glycemic index may increase the risk of developing age-related macular degeneration.

**Special Vitamins for Age-Related Macular Degeneration**

The National Eye Institute’s (NEI) Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) found that taking nutritional supplements with a specific high-dose formula of antioxidants (vitamins C and E and beta-carotene), zinc, and copper may delay or prevent intermediate age-related macular degeneration from progressing to the advanced stage.

A follow-up trial, called AREDS2, was completed in May 2013. That study focused on the addition of lutein, zeaxanthin, and omega-3 fatty acids to the original AREDS formula. Researchers found that the addition of omega-3 fatty acids to the supplements did not improve the formula’s success. The antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin proved safer than beta-carotene, which increases the risk of lung cancer for smokers and ex-smokers.

The AREDS2 recommendation for the supplement formula is now:

- 500 milligrams of vitamin C
- 400 international units of vitamin E
- 10 milligrams of lutein
- 2 milligrams of zeaxanthin
- 80 milligrams of zinc, and
- 2 milligrams of copper
The antioxidant vitamins and minerals in the AREDS2 formula help maintain healthy cells and tissues and may prevent damage in the macula. There is no evidence, however, that the AREDS2 formula provides any benefit to people with early stage age-related macular degeneration. Rather, patients with intermediate macular degeneration in one or both eyes or advanced macular degeneration (dry or wet) in one eye but not the other eye should consider taking the formula.

Always consult a doctor before taking any supplements. The AREDS2 formula may be contra-indicated due to other medical conditions or other medications.

“Living with Macular Degeneration” and other useful publications can be found on our website at www.brightfocus.org/macularpubs.

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