



HEALTH INFORMATION

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See the Light with Antioxidants

April 17, 2008—According to a new study in the *Archives of Ophthalmology*, women who get more vitamin E and lutein from diet and supplements are less likely to develop cataracts, adding to a growing body of research supporting the role of antioxidants in maintaining eye health.

The new study aimed to determine if antioxidant nutrients might decrease the risk of developing cataracts in 35,551 women who took part in the Women's Health Study. The women gave detailed information about their intake of antioxidants from diet and supplements.

During the ten-year follow-up period, 2,031 women developed cataracts. Women with the highest intake of vitamin E had a 14% lower risk of cataracts than did women with the lowest intake. Similarly, those who consumed the most lutein had an 18% lower risk. Intakes of vitamin C, beta carotene, alpha carotene, and lycopene were not related to cataract risk.

The risk reduction appeared to be from a combination of food and supplement sources. Women whose diets were highest in fruits and vegetables had a borderline decrease in cataract risk, suggesting that supplemental antioxidants are needed for the maximal effect.

Cataracts are a clouding of the lens of the eye. They tend to develop gradually, making it progressively harder to see in low light or where there is significant glare from the sun. Cataracts also make distance vision more difficult and can cause halos to appear around lights.

The formation of cataracts is most likely related to oxidative damage of tissues within the eye. Previous studies have suggested that antioxidant nutrients like vitamin C, vitamin E, beta carotene and its relatives lutein and zeaxanthin could help protect against this damage.

Tips for healthy eyes

- *Get regular eye exams:* The National Eye Institute recommends that people age 60 and older get a complete eye exam at least once every two years.
- *Don't smoke:* Smoking generates free radicals in the body, increasing the risk of developing cataracts.
- *Wear sunglasses:* Excess exposure to ultraviolet light can

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damage the eye lens.

- *Eat plenty of deeply colored vegetables and fruits:* Spinach, kale, collard greens, sweet potatoes, winter squash, and berries are rich in antioxidant nutrients that play a role in eye health. Almonds, sunflower seeds, and avocado are great sources of vitamin E.
- *Consider taking an antioxidant supplement:* Combination products containing vitamin E, lutein, and other carotenoids are widely available.

Dr. Lesa Werner, a naturopathic physician in Los Angeles comments, "Having certain health conditions such as diabetes or taking various medications to treat other illnesses have been shown to play an important role in cataract formation. Getting regular check-ups and taking natural remedies to help decrease free radical formation in the body can go a long way in preventing this condition."

(*Arch Ophthalmol* 2008;126:102-9)

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