



Vitamins for Eye Health

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Vitamins and nutritional supplements are a multi-billion-dollar industry. A recent visit to the supermarket pharmacy revealed a mind-boggling number of preparations marketed as supplements for reasons such as the prevention of aging, restoration of healthy bones and joints, improvement in vitality, prevention of disease, and so on. Unfortunately, the oversight exercised by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) over the vitamin and nutritional supplement industry is relatively lax compared to

that for prescription drugs, and most supplements are available over-the-counter without a prescription. Thus, a consumer's choice may sometimes be influenced more by marketing activities of a particular product than its true merit based on scientific evidence.

Do We Need Vitamins?

In this era of fast and processed food, our diet is not as healthy as it needs to be. Cooking, peeling, and processing our food can destroy many vitamins. The American Medical Association

recommends that all adults take a daily multivitamin adequate to meet our daily requirements, promote health, and prevent disease.

What is Oxidative Damage?

Every living cell needs oxygen to burn fuel and generate energy to keep its functions going, a process known as metabolism. Over time, waste material resulting from metabolic activities can cause damage to cells. The most common type of waste material results from oxygen reacting with fats and proteins in our body. This is called oxidative damage, because it is caused by the effect of oxygen on the tissues. A common example of oxidative damage is premature aging and wrinkling of skin in individuals who sunbathe extensively. Similar mechanisms are likely involved in Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, cataract formation, and macular degeneration.

What are Anti-oxidants?

Nature provides chemicals that can absorb harmful molecules of oxygen and prevent oxidative damage. The most common of these chemicals are known as carotenoids, which are present in leaves, colored fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Leaves of plants are green due to chlorophyll that absorbs light energy and converts carbon dioxide gas to glucose. As chlorophyll fades during fall season, rich and vibrant colors of leaves are revealed making the fall season so spectacular. Next time you see a colorful fall leaf, remind yourself that the color is produced by carotenoids that work behind the scene to keep the oxidative damage at bay.

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A formula containing a high dose of vitamin C, zinc, beta-carotene, and vitamin E was shown to decrease the risk of blindness in patients suffering from moderately severe dry macular degeneration in the original study



known as AREDS, or Age Related Eye Disease Study. The same formula did not slow down progression of cataract development. Because beta-carotene has been shown to increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers, and high doses of zinc may make men more vulnerable to prostate infection, the National Institute of Health recommended after the subsequent study, AREDS2, that beta-carotene be replaced by lutein and zeaxanthin, and the dose of zinc be reduced from the previously recommended 80 mg/day to 15 mg/day. OcuVite Preservision with Lutein, or the similar generic formulation is adequate for slowing down macular degeneration. It is not for everyone, and should be taken only by patients who have at least moderate macular degeneration, or those who have lost reading vision in one eye from macular degeneration. Fish oil did not provide any additional benefit and is no longer recommended for slowing down macular degeneration. However, fish oil and other sources of omega-3 fatty acids also promote heart health and may be taken for that reason.

Dr. Kamal Kishore is a retina specialist at Illinois Retina Institute. If you would like more information or would like to schedule an appointment, please call 309-589-1880.

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