

[IMAGE]

## Take Care of Your Vision

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Our eyes may be one of our smallest organs but they are one of the most important ones. Our life would not be the same without our vision and for those of you with vision problems, you know this to be a fact when you remove your corrective lenses. So, what can we do to keep our small but extremely important organ healthy?

As with any other organ in our body, our eyes need rest, oxygenation, hydration and nutrients for healthy functioning along with avoidance of damaging factors to the eyes. So if you wear contact lenses, remember to take them out and allow them to get adequate oxygenation and hydration overnight as you sleep. During the daytime, remember to wear your sunglasses to avoid ultraviolet radiation damage to our eyes as well. Lastly, our eyes also need nutrients we get from our food; so attention paid to our diet feeds more than our stomach and body, it feeds our eyes as well.

In general, a diet rich in plant-based foods, healthy fats, fiber, and antioxidants are essential to our goal of taking care of our vision. When we eat a diet rich in rainbow-colored vegetables, we will naturally have sufficient intake of vitamin A including beta-carotene, lutein, and zeaxanthin, vitamin E, vitamin C, zinc, and copper, just to name a few. In addition, when you add whole grains and healthy fats found in nuts, olive oil, fish, and avocados, you'll be able to create a healthy well-rounded nutrient-rich environment in your body for your eyes to get all of the nutrients it needs to function optimally.

A typical diet that would be eye-healthy would include berries for its anthocyanins to help with night vision, various yellow and red vegetables for the necessary vitamins needed for ideal daytime vision, and foods like eggs, garlic, and onion that contain sulfur to help with the generation of glutathione to help create a healthy environment for our lens of the eye.

Even though what we eat is extremely important to our eye health, what we don't eat or drink is sometimes just as important. In general, I recommend that my patients eat organic if they can to avoid pesticides because chemicals found in pesticides can cause inflammation and can act as xenoestrogens, which can impact the body as a chemical hormone. Avoidance of caffeine is also important to avoid dehydration and

poor quality of sleep. Finally, avoidance of processed refined sugars and carbohydrates are ideal since they generally cause inflammation in the body thus degradation of cellular functioning.

So, as the weather starts to improve and you are waking up to sunshine instead of darkness, allow your eyes to rejoice in the sunlight streaming in the window but remember to avoid and add the following to ensure healthy eyes for as long as you can:

1. Avoid prolonged direct sun exposure to eyes so wear sunglasses when it's bright.
  2. Avoid pesticides, caffeine, and refined sugar.
  3. Make sure to get adequate rest, hydration, and oxygenation to your body and eyes.
  4. Make sure to eat a mostly plant-based diet with healthy fats, lean low saturated fat proteins, and whole grains.
  5. Remember to avoid prolonged chemical or contact lens exposure so that you allow for a natural healing environment on a daily basis.
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