

[IMAGE]

A Supplement for Sore Eyes

The leading cause of blindness and visual impairment among those 65 and older is age-related macular degeneration (AMD). AMD occurs when light-sensing cells on the back of the eye malfunction and die off, causing a gradual loss of central (not peripheral) vision. There is no proven treatment to slow or prevent the progression of advanced AMD, but in its early stages some supplements may be effective. The purpose of a recent study in the *Archives of Ophthalmology* was to determine the effectiveness of dietary antioxidants at preventing AMD.

This study determined the effects of high daily doses of antioxidants (vitamin C - 500 milligrams; vitamin E - 400 IU; beta-carotene - 15 mg), zinc (80 mg), and the combined effects of zinc and antioxidants, on macular degeneration. Patients aged 55 to 80 were followed for approximately six years; all 3,500 individuals were considered to be at-risk for AMD.

Individuals at high risk for macular degeneration who took antioxidant supplements plus zinc for six years significantly lowered their risk for the condition, compared to those given a placebo (e.g., sugar pills). This group also showed a significant reduction in loss of visual clarity. Those given antioxidants or zinc alone reduced their chances for developing AMD, but by a smaller amount, and showed no change in visual acuity.

After age 55, schedule annual dilated eye examinations to determine your risk of AMD. If you are at a high risk for the condition, consider antioxidant and zinc supplementation. Red meat and shellfish contain high levels of zinc. Dietary antioxidants are concentrated in oranges; nuts and seeds; cantaloupe; broccoli; dark-green leafy vegetables; and sweet potatoes.

Reference: Age-Related Eye Disease Study Research Group. A randomized, placebo-controlled, clinical trial of high-dose supplementation with vitamins C and E, beta-carotene, and zinc for age-related macular degeneration and vision loss. *Archives of Ophthalmology* 2001;119(10), pp. 1417-1436.

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