



Watching Your Diet? Focus on Vision Health

Vision health advice from John Lahr, O.D., FAAO

Forget the carrots. American diets generally include plenty of vitamin A. There's no advantage in consuming more through supplements or through food.

According to the American Optometric Association, the nutrients that scientific research has correlated to healthy vision—and often lacking in American diets—include zinc, lutein and zeaxanthin, vitamin C and Omega-3 fatty acids.

Why you need it and where to find it.

Zinc

Although Americans consume plenty of vitamin A, we need some help transferring the vitamin A from our liver to our eyes. Zinc is a “helper molecule” that transfers vitamin A to where we need it.

Zinc deficiency has been linked to poor night vision and cataracts. If that's not enough to convince you to include zinc in your daily diet, mental sluggishness and greater susceptibility to infection can also be traced to low zinc intake.

Individuals at risk for age-related macular degeneration or in the early stages of the disease are encouraged to include higher than the standard daily recommended doses of zinc in their daily diets. Because high levels of zinc can interfere with copper absorption, doctors often recommend copper supplements. Speak with your eye doctor or family physician to learn more.

What to eat: Good sources of zinc include red meat, seafood, poultry, eggs, wheat germ, mixed nuts, black-eyed peas, tofu and baked beans.

Lutein and Zeaxanthin

There are many studies that show the risk for age-related macular degeneration and cataracts is lower in people who regularly consume foods with lutein and zeaxanthin. Unfortunately, many Americans do not consume foods with high amounts of these key nutrients. Supplements are readily available and contain the recommended amounts of both lutein and zeaxanthin.

To learn more and to find an eye doctor in your area,
visit: www.eyesiteonwellness.com



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What to eat: Eggs, oranges, corn and dark, leafy greens such as broccoli, kale, turnip greens, collards, green beans and raw spinach are important sources of these eye-friendly nutrients. If you prefer a supplement, recent studies show a health benefit for lutein supplementation at 10 mg a day and zeaxanthin supplementation at 2 mg a day.

Omega-3 and Omega-6

Large amounts of Omega-3 (EPA and DHA) essential fatty acids are present in healthy retinas. Studies of infants suggest that daily amounts of Omega-3, particularly DHA, are necessary for optimal visual development, and dry-eye syndrome has also been linked to Omega-3 deficiency, particularly EPA. Diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration and retinopathy of prematurity may be linked to low levels of Omega-3, although more research is necessary.

What to eat: The best sources of both essential fatty acids are fatty fishes like salmon, mackerel, halibut, trout, scallops and tuna. If you do not eat fish, consider taking triglyceride-based fish oil or supplements.

Vitamin E

Although not a primary nutrient contributing to eye health, vitamin E stabilizes Omega-3 fatty acids, so it is worth considering as a complementary vitamin if you are trying to derive the vision benefits of Omega-3. In addition, sufficient daily intake of vitamin E is critical to a healthy immune system, the health of cell membranes, DNA repair and in other metabolic processes.

What to eat: Nuts, vegetable oils, peanuts and peanut butter, many cereals and sweet potatoes are good sources. There are also many vitamin E-fortified beverages and supplements.

Always talk to your doctor.

Ask your eye doctor or family physician about how increasing your regular intake of any of the nutrients described above could interact with prescriptions or complicate other medical conditions. Open, regular communication with your health care providers is as critical to your health as your diet and your exercise routine. It's just another reason to develop and maintain the habit of regular checkups and eye exams.

About the author: Dr. Lahr is the vice president of provider relations and medical director of EyeMed Vision Care. He's been a full-time member of the EyeMed team for 12 years, and has served the company as medical director since 2005. Earlier in his career, he owned and operated his own optometric practice in Minnesota. Dr. Lahr has served on the American Optometry Association's EyeCare Benefit Center for 10 years and is a past president of the Minnesota Optometric Association.

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