

Creating Health & Nutrition

How Nutrition Protects Eye Health

Age-Related Eye Diseases

By the age of 65, one in three Americans has some form of vision-impairing eye condition. Four major age-related eye diseases affect older adults: glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy.

- **Glaucoma** damages the optic nerve and is often caused by an abnormally high pressure in the eye.
- **Cataracts** are caused by clouding or a clumping of protein in the lens of the eye, which complicates light flow and the ability to see clearly.
- **Macular degeneration** affects the macula, an area at the center of the retina that is responsible for focused, central vision.
- **Diabetic retinopathy** is caused by damage to the blood vessels of the light-sensitive retina in the back of the eye.

Oxidation and inflammation are the main causes of these eye diseases. The lens of the eye is most susceptible to oxidative damage because its protective

cells don't renew themselves. Fatty acids found in the tissues of the eye can become oxidized, which can cause free radicals to form. These free radicals cause damage to the cells of the eye, resulting in a loss of function and structural integrity.

Nutrition for Eye Health

A recent survey found that among the adult population, vision was ranked as the most important of the five senses. Over half of those surveyed were unaware of the key nutrients that play a role in eye health. Growing evidence shows that antioxidants—nutrients that protect against the oxidative damage of free radicals—and foods with anti-inflammatory properties may provide protection and decrease the risk of developing an eye disease. The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS and AREDS2) found that certain nutrients may reduce the risk of age-related decline in eye health by 25 percent. Further studies found eating a healthy, balanced diet rich in vitamin C, vitamin E, beta carotene, lutein, zeaxanthin, omega-3 fatty

acids, and other antioxidants like catechins are all vital for eye health. The Mediterranean diet eating pattern has been found to reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration.

What foods should we be eating to consume these nutrients and lower our risk for developing an eye disease? Following an eating pattern high in brightly colored fruits and vegetables is a good start.

- **Berries** are great for your eyes because they contain plenty of vitamin C and other antioxidants that may help lower your risk of cataracts.
- **Deep orange vegetables** like sweet potatoes, carrots, and pumpkin are a great source of beta carotene, a type of vitamin A that may help reduce the risk of eye diseases and protect the eye from sunlight damage.
- **Fish high in omega-3 fatty acids** like salmon, herring, sardines, and mackerel are an excellent source of omega-3

fatty acids, which are known for their anti-inflammatory properties and have also been linked to improved eye health.

- **Leafy greens** like spinach and kale are a rich source of lutein and zeaxanthin, which may help protect eye tissues from sunlight damage and reduce the risk of eye changes related to aging. Include a little drizzle of a healthy fat, such as olive oil, or a few slices of avocado to aid in the absorption of lutein and zeaxanthin.
- A cup of **green tea** may be relaxing and delicious, but it is also packed full of antioxidants in the form of catechins. These catechins help prevent cell damage and reduce the formation of free radicals.

If some of the above foods are not your favorite, try other foods rich in vitamin C like bell peppers, oranges, or cantaloupe. Swap sweet potatoes and carrots for apricots and



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dark green leafy vegetables like collard greens or kale for your vitamin A and beta carotene fix. Walnuts, flax seeds, and chia seeds are other excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids. And don't forget about the catechins found in dark chocolate! Try adding one or two of these foods to your meals or snacks each day to increase your eye and overall health.

Sources

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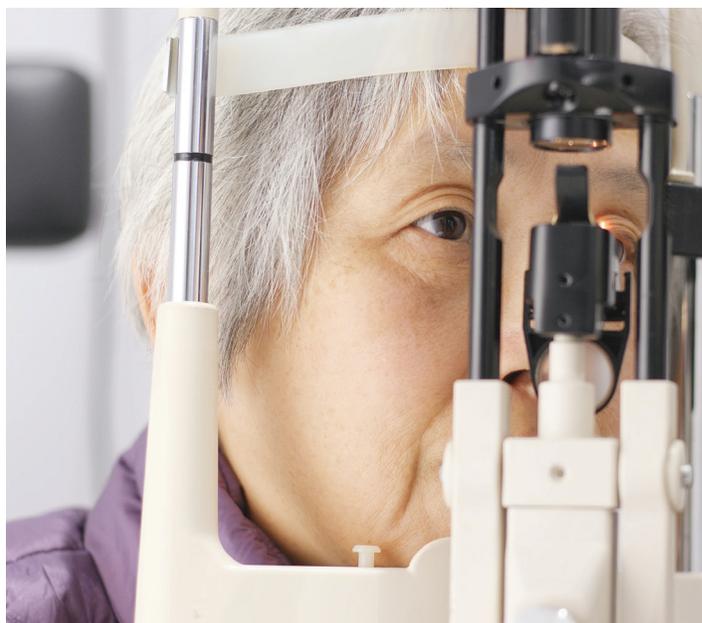
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