

# An Eye on Vision Supplements

## See into the future

Whether you think of them as windows to the soul or as complex ocular organs, the eyes are our principal means of taking in the world. They get a lot of use: reading, driving, watching over children—not to mention staring at all those big and little screens we spend so much time hovered over. In fact, other than eight or so daily hours of sleep time and the occasional mid-afternoon breather, our peepers are on constant duty.

Jeepers creepers! That's a life-time of steady—and frequently straining—eye work. Luckily, there are steps we can take to increase the chances that our vision stays clear and sharp as we age.

Get regular eye exams (the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends an eye disease screening at age 40), exercise, and eat a balanced diet. To help protect your sight and prevent diseases of the eye including glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and cataracts, incorporate these supplements into your daily regimen.

### The View on Vitamins

Beta carotene (a form of vitamin A), vitamins C and E, and the mineral zinc are all important nutrients for healthy eyes. A 2010 study of the effects of antioxidants, micronutrients, and plant chemicals on the progression of eye diseases concluded that supplements of vitamins A, C, and E, along with zinc, may work to prevent advanced age-related macular degeneration in people at high risk for the disease. Other research indicates there may be a link between glaucoma and deficiencies in vitamins C and E.

### Ogle Omegas

Found in fish, flaxseed, canola, and walnut oils, omega-3 fatty acids may lower the risk of cataracts and prevent the progression of macular degeneration. A 10-year study of 3,654 elderly Australians indicates that diets including fish and omega 3s may protect against early age-related macular degeneration. A shorter study, in which healthy people ages 45 to 77 were given 90 days of supplementation with either a placebo or the omega 3 docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), found that those in the DHA group who wore corrective lenses experienced sharper vision after the treatment.

### Ante Up with Antioxidants

With anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, lutein and zeaxanthin make up the pigment of the macula—a part of the retina that's critical to sharp vision. Studies have shown that supplementation with these two carotenoids—natural red, yellow, orange, and green pigments found in fruits and vegetables—can help reduce symptoms of visual fatigue and improve vision, particularly contrast sensitivity, in people who spend long hours in front of a computer screen.

They can also help protect your eyesight into the future. A scientist at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry reviewed studies on dietary supplements to promote eyesight and eye health, and concluded that the research supports the use of lutein and zeaxanthin “to promote optimal visual function and decrease risk for AMD and cataracts.” TFL

## Beyond Cool

Most of us are diligent when it comes to protecting our skin from the harmful rays of the sun. Turns out our eyes need that same careful attention. As the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's SunWise Program notes, UV radiation from the sun can:

- increase the likelihood of some types of cataracts
- cause pterygium (tissue growth that can interfere with vision)
- lead to skin cancer around the eyes

- contribute to macular degeneration.

Luckily, you can lessen your chances of developing these eye problems and look hip at the same time, just by putting on sunglasses. The EPA recommends lenses that offer 99 to 100 percent UV protection.

SELECTED SOURCES “A 12-Week Lutein Supplementation Improves Visual Function in Chinese People with Long-Term Computer Display Light Exposure” by L. Ma et al., *Br J Nutr*, 7/09 n “Ask the Herbalist: 9 Herbs for Healthy Eyes” by Linda B. White, MD, *The Herb Companion*, [www.herbcompanion.com](http://www.herbcompanion.com), 4–5/11 n *The Big Book of Family Eye Care* by Joseph DiGirolamo, OD (\$19.95, Basic Health, 2011) n “Care of the Eyes Demands Diligence” by Nicholas Bakalar, *New York Times*, 5/13/08 n “Dietary Deficiency of Vitamin E Aggravates Retinal Ganglion Cell Death in Experimental Glaucoma of Rats” by M. L. Ko et al., *Curr Eye Res*, 9/10 n “Dietary Fatty Acids and the 10-Year Incidence of Age-related Macular Degeneration: The Blue Mountains Eye Study” by J. S. Tan et al., *Arch Ophthalmol*, 5/09 n “Dietary Supplementation: Effects on Visual Performance and Occurrence of AMD and Cataracts” by F. M. Barker II, *Curr Med Res Opin*, 8/10 n “The Effect of Lutein Supplementation on Visual Fatigue: A Psychophysiological Analysis” by A. Yagi et al., *Appl Ergon*, 11/09 n “Health Effects of Overexposure to the Sun,” EPA SunWise Program, [www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvandhealth.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvandhealth.html) n “The Importance of Nutrition in the Prevention of Ocular Disease with Special Reference to Cataract” by V. Agte and K. Tarwadi, *Ophthalmic Res*, 9/9/10 n *Prescription for Nutritional Healing: The A to Z Guide to Supplements* by Phyllis A. Balch, CNC (\$12.95, Penguin Group/Avery, 2006) n “Reduced-serum Vitamin C and Increased Uric Acid Levels in Normal-tension Glaucoma” by K. Yuki et al., *Graefes Arch Clin Exp Ophthalmol*, 2/10 n “What is an Ophthalmologist?” The Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, [www.eyecareamerica.org](http://www.eyecareamerica.org)