

SEEING RESULTS

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.

Dear Dr. Aieta,

My wife and I are both over the age of 65, and were told that we have something called age-related macular degeneration. We get routine eye exams and, each time, the deterioration in our vision appears to be getting worse. We both have been ... eating a well balanced diet, controlling our blood pressure and cholesterol and protecting our eyes from bright sunlight as recommended by our eye doctor. ... Are there any dietary supplements or foods that may help stop the progression of this disease or possibly reverse it?

Jim and Cathy W.

Some physicians consider age-related macular degeneration to be a natural consequence of the aging process, but research has shown that certain nutrients can delay or inhibit retinal damage. I have had numerous patients not only slow down the process, but also reverse it and see significant improvement in their vision.

Consider the following:

The nutrient zinc is present in high concentrations in healthy eyes, and it plays a key role in maintaining normal vision. When rats were fed a zinc-deficient diet, they developed impaired retinal function and loss of visual acuity. Elderly patients

may not be getting enough zinc from their diet, so supplementation is very important.

High levels of the amino acid taurine are also found in the retina. Taurine is believed to protect retinal cells from the harmful effects of ultraviolet light and toxic substances. One of the major causes of progressive retinal deterioration is tissue-damaging oxygen free-radicals and UV light. Antioxidants are important for maintaining eye health by reducing free-radical damage.

Vitamin C is also naturally present in high concentrations in the eye and has been shown to prevent retinal damage in animals that are exposed to excessive amounts of UV light. Vitamin E is also another key antioxidant for the retina. In a study of 39 patients with macular degeneration, supplementing with vitamin E improved vision in 72 percent of participants. Selenium is also present in high concentration in the eye, where it plays a major role as an antioxidant and protector. I have had several patients with macular degeneration whose vision improved dramatically after taking just supplements with selenium and Vitamin E.

It has been shown in population studies that diets high in fruits and vegetables rich in beta-carotene have been shown to



significantly reduce the risk of developing macular degeneration. Other compounds similar to beta-carotene, such as what can be found in dark green vegetables, particularly spinach and collard greens, are also important for eye health. Other beneficial foods are ones that contain flavonoids – foods like blueberries and grapes.

In addition, Ginkgo biloba improved vision in 10 patients with such issues in a double-blind study with a placebo.

If you have been noticing that your vision is slowly getting worse, work with a naturopathic physician to get you on the right dosages of the supplements recommended above and fine-tune your diet.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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