



Nutrition and Eye Health

“Eat your carrots!” Many of us remember hearing this as kids, with parents praising the vitamin A in carrots for good eyesight. But this raises a bigger question — what nutrients are essential for maintaining eye health, and can they help treat certain eye conditions and diseases?

The impact of nutrition on your eyes and vision

Let's review the nutrients that have proven to be beneficial to our eyes and vision. As you go through the list of nutrient-rich foods, you might wonder, "Am I getting enough of these in my diet?" You may even dislike some of them - but they're worth including in your routine. The reality is that modern diets often lack essential nutrients, making supplements a crucial solution. This is especially true for nutrients like omega-3s, which the body cannot produce on its own.

Nutrients for eye and vision health



Vitamin A, also known as retinol, is used in the production of the pigments in the retina of the eye. More importantly, it is a vital nutrient for the rod photoreceptors in your eyes, which determine vision quality in low-light conditions.

Food sources: egg yolks, dairy, liver, green leafy vegetables, and carrots



Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) is a well-known nutrient that is highly concentrated in the aqueous humor fluid in front of the crystalline lens. It is thought to be a key antioxidant that may prevent age-related cataracts. Your body cannot produce this nutrient on its own.

Food sources: broccoli, kale, peppers, and oranges



Vitamin E — unlike vitamins A and C, which are single compounds, vitamin E is a group of compounds called tocopherols. These compounds indirectly benefit eyes by protecting critical fatty acids, such as omega-3s, from oxidation.

Food sources: avocados, almonds, and sunflower seeds



Lutein and zeaxanthin are pigment compounds known as carotenoids, found in high concentrations in the central retina known as the macula and fovea. Studies have shown that these compounds can stabilize the progression of macular degeneration in some individuals and may have preventive properties.

Food sources: chard, spinach, kale, raspberries, and peaches



Flavonoids are found in a variety of plants and have been linked to improved function in retinal ganglion cells — neurons that link the retina to the sections of the brain that process visual input. The benefits are best attained by consuming a variety of sources of flavonoids rather than a specific quantity.

Food sources: dark chocolate, red wine, berries, citrus, and tea

Nutrients for eye and vision health (continued)



Selenium is an important mineral that acts as a preventive antioxidant for several eye conditions, including macular degeneration and cataracts. Most notably, selenium deficiency has been linked to thyroid eye disease.

Food sources: dairy, eggs, seafood, nuts, and seeds



Zinc is found in high concentrations in the eye and is a component of a formulation used to prevent macular degeneration progression. This mineral may also promote retinal pigment formation.

Food sources: meat, oysters, peanuts, and pumpkin seeds



Fatty acids that include omega-3 are essential fatty acids that are not produced by the body and must therefore be obtained via intake. There are two long-chain omega-3s — EPA, which is a powerful anti-inflammatory, and DHA, which is found in high concentrations in the retina.

Omega-3 food sources: fatty fish and algae

Omega-6 food sources: walnuts, tofu, and seeds



In summary

To keep your eyes healthy, make sure to eat a balanced diet with leafy greens like kale, broccoli, spinach, and chard; dairy and eggs; nuts, seeds, avocados, fruits such as berries and citrus; and fish — and of course, carrots!

Stay healthy.

SOURCE: Content written by Dr. John Lahr, OD., FAAO and verified using information found at this link. "8 Nutrients That Will Optimize Your Eye Health"; Healthline, updated November 21, 2024.

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