

Diet and Age Related Eye Disorders by Vicki Holmes MD

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Dry Eye Syndrome is common. About 10% of those over 75 suffer with this, however many people over 50 have this problem but are not diagnosed. Our eyelids are lined with meibomian glands. They can be harmfully affected by disorders such as acne/rosacea and seborrheic dermatitis. With Dry Eye Syndrome, the tears become thicker, partially related to the change in the composition of tears in the eyelids and substances that promote inflammation.

Many experience a burning, foreign body sensation. The lids may become red resulting in loss of eyelashes. Vision may fluctuate. Eyes feel dry.

Investigations by an ophthalmologist can confirm this diagnosis. The doctor checks the tears, and may examine the eye with a slit lamp microscope. The condition is usually treated with artificial tears, eyelid scrub and hygiene, and steroid/antibiotic drops.

What is exciting to me is that researchers have been studying the triglyceride form of Omega 3 and have found this may help restore the lipids in the tears and suppress inflammation. People in a large study who had a severe form of this condition had much higher ratio of Omega 6 to Omega 3. Their ratios were 15/1 instead of the recommended 4/1. Omega 6 is found in fried and highly processed foods, sunflower and corn oil. Foods cooked at high temperatures cause conversion to trans fats which are not healthy. Reducing your Omega 6 intake by reducing foods fried at high temperatures and eliminating trans fats may help restore the lipid balance in tears.

To get the healthy Omega 3 you should eat cold water fish twice/week and use flaxseed oil, walnuts, dark green leafy vegetables and olive oil.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in people over 55. More people are affected with this than glaucoma and cataracts combined. It affects men and women equally.

The macula is the center area of the retina responsible for the most acute vision. This area has the most concentration of light sensing nerves in the retina and they need a rich blood supply so anything that we do to harm the cardiovascular system will negatively affect this blood supply. Factors that we can't control are increasing age, family history and Caucasian ethnicity, but there are things that we can do to reduce the other factors that will bring this on:

- Stop smoking - smokers are four times more likely to get this and have a 10-year earlier onset.
- Increase the Omega 3 in our diet by reducing our intake of processed and packaged food and eating lots of dark green leafy vegetables.
- Eat foods that are high in antioxidants and zinc.
- Exercise and maintain normal weight.
- Control your blood pressure.

- Wear sunglasses that block UV light and blue light
- Get regular eye exams

A cookbook that is an excellent resource is **Eat Right for Your Sight**, by Jennifer Trainer Thompson and Johanna Seddon. It is produced by The American Macular Degeneration Federation.

Supplements recommended by Age Related Eye Disease Study 2 showed that for those with intermediate disease slowed the progression by 25% and slowed vision loss by 19%.

These supplements contained

- 500 mg Vitamin C
- 400 IU of Vitamin E
- 80mg Zinc
- 2 mg Copper
- 10 mg Lutein
- 2 mg Zeaxanthin

We can get these nutrients from our diet by increasing our intake of:

- Vitamin C from citrus fruits, melons, tomatoes, broccoli, potatoes
- Vitamin E from soybeans, greens, fish, wheat germ, nuts and seeds
- Zinc from legumes and whole grains
- Lutein from spinach, kale, Romaine lettuce, peas, berries and fruit

Once again, a lot of our age related disorders are clearly related to lifestyle. The good news is, we can do something about that!