

To See Well, You Have To Eat Well!

Good Nutrition Key To Protecting Vision



Remember how Mom used to keep after you to “eat your carrots because they’re good for your eyes!”

Mom may not have earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry – but there’s been some surprising health research in recent years to show that she knew what she was talking about.

The new scientific findings strongly suggest that Bugs Bunny’s favorite food actually does help to protect vision . . . by slowing down the development of two major eye disorders that affect millions of older Americans.

“Eating carrots won’t make you see better than you already do, but there is a lot of truth in the idea that they can help protect vision,” says VSP network doctor Leland Carr, O.D. “Carrots contain a lot of vitamin A, and there have been several studies recently showing that this vitamin – along with vitamins C and E – helps to reduce the impact of both cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

“These eye disorders are common among older people, and that’s why I often advise my patients to eat lots of carrots and green, leafy vegetables such as spinach and kale. Those vegetables contain significant amounts of the key vitamins – along with a substance called lutein that also protects vision.”

While pointing to a major federal study recently showing that the three vitamins (plus the mineral zinc) are effective at lowering the risk of advanced AMD, Dr. Carr warns that “developing good eating habits and taking in the right nutrients is essential” to healthy vision.

“One of the best things you can do for your eyes is to eat a balanced diet high in fruits and vegetables, but also low in saturated fats and sugar,” adds Dr. Carr, a professor of optometry at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma. Dr. Carr also sees patients regularly at several university-run eye clinics.

“Along with the vitamins, you should be sure to take in adequate amounts of the minerals zinc and selenium, both of which help protect the retina – the light sensitive part of the back of the eye. You also need some fatty acids – usually from fish – to ensure adequate moisture in your eyes. Ask your family doctor if taking food supplements containing these substances is right for you.”



The Oklahoma practitioner also advises patients to monitor their diets in order to avoid obesity – an increasingly common condition that significantly increases the risk of developing diabetes. This chronic disease can trigger vision-threatening diabetic retinopathy, in which sensitive retinal tissues are destroyed by excessive blood sugar.

For patients who are already diabetic, it’s especially important to maintain good nutrition habits – in order to prevent retinal damage from high blood sugar that can lead to blindness.

“Annual eye exams are critical for keeping your eyes healthy and for your overall health,” says Dr. Carr. “At your next eye exam, discuss your eating habits with your VSP doctor to make sure you’re helping your vision.”

Dr. Carr recommends at least three servings from each of the following food groups per week:

- Vitamin A:** Carrots, kale, spinach, dairy products, egg yolks
- Vitamin C:** Citrus fruits (especially kiwi fruit) and juices, green peppers, broccoli, potatoes
- Vitamin E:** Eggs, whole grains, vegetable oils, sunflower seeds
- Lutein:** Spinach, corn, kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
- Fatty acids:** Coldwater fish, such as salmon, mackerel and rainbow trout; sunflower oil, corn oil
- Zinc:** Meat, poultry, fish, whole grains, dairy products •