

## **EYE-Q**

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

### **Nutritional Supplements and Eye Health**

The National Eye Institute of the National Institutes of Health designates January of each year as National Eye Health Month. Last week we spoke of some of the myths and facts regarding eye health and today I would like to spend a little time talking about supplements and their affect on eye health.

There are many nutritional supplements on the market today. Each one touts how it is the best at protecting you from any of a number of actual or imagined ailments. It seems if you read the labels carefully enough you can identify some frightening conditions you never knew you had based on the long list of symptoms that many of these supplements profess to control. I wouldn't doubt that there is probably a supplement out there that could help you if your ailment consists of falling asleep at night and waking in the morning.

All kidding aside, many of the supplements we take daily are not really necessary if we follow a common sense approach to diet, exercise and healthy lifestyle choices. However, because we choose a less than rigorous approach (myself included) some of the supplements out there are probably helpful in ensuring that we remain relatively healthy in spite of ourselves.

First let's talk about antioxidants. Oxidation is a natural side effect of the normal metabolic process that keeps our personal power plant operating. But the oxidative process takes a toll on our bodies by leaving behind byproducts called oxidants. These deposits play a powerful role in the changes our bodies undergo over the years. We call this the aging process. The development of cataracts, macular degeneration and dry eye symptoms are a few of the obvious changes our eyes have to deal with.

Antioxidants are, for the most part, naturally occurring substances that bind these oxidants and diminish their adverse effects. You can find antioxidants in many food sources such as leafy green vegetables, legumes, and the skins of tubers and root vegetables. Additional sources of antioxidants can be found in the multivitamin and mineral complexes we take daily. Vitamins A, C, D and E along with zinc, copper, lutein and other elemental minerals also help.

Omega-3 fatty acids are an excellent choice in antioxidant therapy. My patients will tell you that I am a big believer in the use of flax oil as a supplement for dry eyes. Many studies of the benefits of omega-3s can be found in the literature and on-line. Personally, I like the flax oil gel caps because I know exactly how much I'm ingesting but ground seeds on your oatmeal or in your bread are other options that are effective.

Omega-3s can also be found in bilberry and grape seed extract and fish oil. I am not fond of the fish oil source simply because I don't like the idea of maybe a little burp making

my mouth taste like I just ate a sardine sandwich. Don't get me wrong, I love sardines; just not when I have an office full of patients.

The important thing to remember with any of these supplements is that price does not dictate quality. There are a lot of manufacturers out there that would have you believe their special "eye formulations" are scientifically proven to protect your eyes better than all the other formulations out there. Pretty much that's just a lot of marketing hype. There is no reliable scientific evidence to prove that any of the more expensive boutique brands are any better or any worse than the traditional brand names such as Centrum and One-A-Day or generic brands

So if you don't listen to your doctor at least listen to your mother and eat right, get some exercise, get plenty of rest and take your vitamins every day for a happy and healthy pair of eyes.

*If you have questions about your eye health e-mail Dr. Barowsky at [doctom@tdkj.com](mailto:doctom@tdkj.com) and we'll try to answer your questions here at Eye-Q.*