

EYE-Q

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Veggies and Fish For Eye Health

The Women's Health Initiative is a long term study looking at various women's health issues. Recently several of the individual studies have been reported in the literature. Of special interest are four reports that show a relationship of vision health and diet.

In the first study, a team did a retrospective study to try to determine if Omega 3 fatty acids, most commonly found in fish and flaxseed products, were beneficial in reducing the risk of age related macular degeneration (AMD). A total of 88,974 charts of patients were reviewed. Because of the nature of the study, certain controls that researchers use to validate their studies were not able to be used. The researchers had to depend on the completeness of the medical record and the long term memories of the patients to determine the effectiveness of the Omega 3 oils in preventing or reducing the risk for AMD. Although other life factors obviously have a role in the development of AMD such as smoking, general dietary habits, environmental quality and other medical conditions that may be present, the study found a 38% reduction in the incidence of late onset AMD in the study population. Their conclusion was that eating fish twice per week lowered the risk of early onset and late onset AMD.

Two other studies looked at the effect of increased dietary and blood levels of the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin and the use of a multivitamin/mineral supplement. The carotenoids are a group of antioxidant nutrients that are critical to the retina's ability to process light and allow us to see well. They can be found in all types of fruits and vegetables especially leafy green veggies such as kale, spinach and collards, yellow skinned fruits and vegetables, honeydew, mango and egg yolks.

In one group of 1802 women between 50 and 79 years of age the serum and dietary levels of these nutrients were measured. In the group that ranked in the 78th percentile showed a 23% reduction in the risk of developing all types of cataracts over those whose serum and dietary levels were only in the 28th percentile. This group also showed a 32% decrease in the risk of developing the common type of cataract known as nuclear sclerosis.

The second study looked at 1020 women who, over a 9 year period, received either a multivitamin/mineral supplement or a placebo (sugar pill). The researchers found that although there was a significant decrease in developing the most common forms of cataract, there was also an increase in the development of less common cataract forms in the group taking the multivitamin/mineral supplement. No firm conclusions were able to be drawn from this study because the many other social and environmental factors that figure in to cataract development were not controllable or measurable.

Finally a study looking at the long term use of vitamin E to reduce cataracts demonstrated no benefit to reducing their development in women in the study.

What does all of this mean? Simply put, there is a strong link to improved eye health connected to the use of antioxidant nutrients in various forms. As with all things however, there is safety in moderation. Dietary supplements have the ability to keep us healthy when approached sensibly or hurt when overused. There is no magic potion or pill that will turn back the clock and getting our Omega 3 nutrients by eating deep fried fish is probably not a good idea but, some common sense changes and additions to our diet sure couldn't hurt. So check out your local Farmer's Market for fresh produce, stay eye healthy and have a great Memorial Day weekend.

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