

EYE-Q

by R. Thomas Barowsky, MD

Eye Drops for Cataracts

When a patient is first diagnosed with early cataracts the big question I always get is: “How can I keep them from getting worse? Are there any eye drops I can use to stop them from developing?” First of all, the most common cause for cataracts is the normal aging process. So, except to quit having birthdays, cataracts will continue to develop as a patient continues to have birthdays. Secondly, in spite of all the hype and advertising, there is no magic drop to halt the progress and development of the cataract.

Many so-called natural cures are on the market today claiming to be effective treatment for various diseases. Some of these have limited use in modern medicine but most are variations of home remedies that have been handed down for generations without any recognized testing or research to back up their claims. In some cases patients have put off proven medical and surgical treatments for these home remedies with disastrous results. Now let’s talk a bit about these anti-cataract drops.

First we need to recall what typically causes cataracts. Cataracts form in the lens of the eye. The protein of the lens slowly changes through a natural process called oxidation. This process causes the naturally clear protein to begin to change color and become less clear. As the aging process continues the protein becomes more and more “smoky” or opaque. This causes light entering the eye to be reflected and refracted and results in glare and halos around lights and a general blurring of vision. The process is very slow and may take decades to reach the point where the vision is significantly affected. Ultraviolet light and natural aging are the two most common stimulants for cataract growth. Cataracts may also form due to medications to treat other medical conditions and because of the effect of certain diseases on the lens protein.

So the simple trick is to halt the normal oxidation process we see in aging eyes to halt the development of cataracts. Obviously this is not a simple trick since we have been trying since the dawn of time to halt the aging process without much success. If Ponce de Leon had not been searching for the fountain of youth, Florida might never have been discovered and Disney World, Busch Gardens and large retirement communities would have to have been built somewhere else.

The eye drops that you speak of commonly have two main ingredients, *Cineraria Maritima* and *Conium Maculatum*. *C. Maritima* is a powerful antioxidant. The theory is that by using a powerful antioxidant one can prevent oxidation and thereby halt the aging process of the lens. There have never been any controlled studies to prove or disprove whether this is true or not. Since this treatment for cataracts has been around for generations without any solid evidence of any kind of positive effect, I have to question its effectiveness. *C. Maculatum* is commonly known as poison hemlock. This is a very dangerous herb; just ask Socrates. Poison hemlock has been used by the ancient Greeks

as a sedative and antispasmodic. It was also used to poison prisoners. Ancient Greek and Arab physicians also used it for a variety of other conditions including arthritis. Unfortunately the toxic amount and the therapeutic amount are so very close together that patients were often cured in the afterlife. The amount of poison hemlock in these drops is so slight that the risk of injury is probably nonexistent but then so would be its value as an anti-cataract medicine.

The best thing to do is eat a healthy diet, take your daily dose of antioxidant vitamins and minerals protect your eyes from ultraviolet light and heed the advise of the manufacturer of these anti-cataract eye drops by having regular eye exams to monitor your cataracts while using the drops.

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.