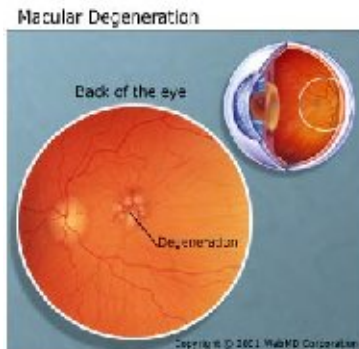


Nutrition and the Eye

The eye is a very sensitive organ with very specific nutrition requirements. In order to stay completely efficient and healthy the eye needs to sustain a balance of several nutrients. Some of the more important of these are outlined in this leaflet in order to give you a guide on how to keep your eyes as healthy as possible.



What Happens?

The purpose of the eye is to gather and process the various wavelengths of light in order for us to navigate through our everyday lives. Unfortunately not all the wavelengths of light that arrive at the eye are visible to us. In particular small amounts of ultra-violet light can escape the body's natural defences and reach the inner structures of our eyes. This UV light, over time, can be very harmful and can culminate in the formation of cataract and Age Related Macula Degeneration (ARMD), amongst other problems.

ARMD is a very common condition in the western world typically occurring in the over 60's age group and is more prevalent in women than in men. Although it can progress very rapidly this is very rare, the more common outcome is a gradual loss of the central vision over a period of years. What happens is that the retinal area responsible for detailed vision (the macula and fovea) are damaged by various mechanisms over time eventually leading to what looks like a black hole in the very centre of your vision. Imagine the affect just after you have stared at a bright bulb. There is usually a small black/purple spot in front of you vision; well that is what a person with ARMD will see all of the time.



Various scientific studies have been performed on both cataracts and ARMD and continue to be studied around the world. Some of the most promising studies are those that take into account the nutrition of the eye.

It has been shown that one of the mechanisms with which both cataracts and ARMD progress is that of the oxidation of ocular tissues by UV light in the presence of low levels of the body's own chemical defences. You may have probably heard of anti-oxidants with respect to some beauty products, but it has been shown that in the presence of adequate anti-oxidants the retina and crystalline lens of the eye can withstand the oxidising affects of UV light and, therefore, become more resistant to both cataracts and ARMD. In cases where the eyes already have traces of these problems the anti-oxidants and in particular, zinc, can improve the visual function of the eye.

Where can I get these nutrients?

There are various ways of getting these nutrients to the eyes and the first and most obvious way is to alter your diet. The eye's natural anti-oxidant is called Leutin and can be found in most dark green leafy vegetables, the most important being **kale**. Others also include spinach, beet greens, and broccoli. Vitamin C can be found in most fruits and vegetables and Vitamin E is found in most fish and in chicken. These foods, when eaten in a well balanced diet, will yield a healthy amount of the nutrients needed to help the eye's natural defences against UV light.

If you are concerned about your diet and feel that you cannot eat enough of the recommended foods above there are commercially available multi-vitamin formulations specifically for the eye. Two of note are **I-Caps** and **Visionace**, both available over the counter. Not only do these contain Leutin, Vitamin C & E but also small amounts of Zinc which can help the eye recover from any damage that may be sustained over time. It is strongly recommended that you take zinc as part of a balanced multi-vitamin or under the supervision of your GP as too much can be harmful.

Smoking and the eye

One final note should be made about the affects of smoking. Another source of oxidising agents (the chemicals indicated in the progression of ARMD and cataracts) is smoking. The best way of reducing your risk of eye disease, let alone something more serious, is to give up smoking. It has also been shown that those who smoke and increase their dietary intake of the nutrients outlined above can also increase their risk of ARMD and other conditions.

The single most important message here is to QUIT SMOKING.