

Eye on Health

A Look At Supplements And Age-Related Eye Disease



Normal Vision

A charming scene as viewed through normal vision is clear and bright.

(NAPSA)—There could be good news for many people who take vitamins and other nutritional supplements to help protect their health. A new study from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) helps clarify which are most effective and safe for treating age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a common eye disease among people age 50 and over.

The Problem

AMD breaks down cells in the back of the eye that provide sharp central vision, necessary for reading, driving and recognizing faces. Advanced AMD can lead to significant vision loss and is a leading cause of blindness in the United States. About 2 million Americans have advanced AMD; another 8 million are at risk. Smoking is a major risk factor.

The Good News

Fortunately, the National Eye Institute's (NEI) Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) found that a combination of vitamins C and E, beta-carotene and the minerals zinc and copper—called the AREDS formulation—can help reduce the risk of advanced AMD by 25 percent.

The Latest News

In a follow-up study, AREDS2,



Age-related Macular Degeneration

The same scene as viewed by a person with age-related macular degeneration.

the researchers discovered that adding omega-3 fatty acids didn't really help; neither did adding lutein and zeaxanthin. Lutein and zeaxanthin together, however, proved to be a safe and effective substitute for beta-carotene, which has been linked to lung cancer risk in smokers.

Doctors' Advice

Study findings show a link between beta-carotene use and lung cancer risk not only for smokers but even for former smokers. "Adding lutein and zeaxanthin in place of beta-carotene could improve the AREDS formulation for both smokers and non-smokers," said lead investigator Emily Chew, M.D.

"Millions of older Americans take nutritional supplements to protect their sight without clear guidance regarding benefit and risk," said NEI director Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D.

Many risk factors contribute to AMD, including age, genetics and diet. People over 60 should get a dilated eye exam at least once a year and consult an eye care professional before using AREDS supplements.

Learn More

For further information, visit www.nei.nih.gov/areds2.