

EYE ON HEALTH

Baby Boomers And Seniors Focus On Avoiding Vision Loss

(NAPSA)—In 2006, the first baby boomers celebrated their 60th birthdays—and as the largest segment of the U.S. population continues to age, concerns about vision loss are escalating. According to the Natural Marketing Institute, 75 percent of the U.S. population worries about preventing vision problems, and 15 percent of adults ages 45 to 64 already have some sort of vision impairment. Today, eye doctors often recommend specific nutritional ingredients, such as zeaxanthin (pronounced zee-uh-zan'thin) and lutein, to help patients protect against common afflictions like Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD).

AMD Affects Many, Has Major Impact

More than 1.7 million Americans currently have AMD, the most common cause of irreversible blindness in the industrialized world. One of six people between the ages of 55 and 64 are afflicted, and by age 75, one out of three people will have it. “Sadly, once AMD occurs, the vision loss is permanent,” said John Landrum, Ph.D., a professor of chemistry at Florida International University who has conducted extensive research on substances that contribute to eye health and macular pigment composition.

Vision loss is a top reason elderly people lose their independence, but it has broader health care implications. Common injuries, including



The marigold flower, beautiful to look at, produces lutein and zeaxanthin. These compounds are used in dietary supplements to prevent age-related vision loss.

hip fractures, often result from vision-impaired seniors falling over obstacles they can't see clearly; the prolonged inactivity or hospitalization following such an injury can lead to serious conditions like pneumonia. This familiar pattern, well known in the elder care industry, is a potential result of vision loss that could be preventable through supplement use.

Encouraging News

A recent study by the Lewin Group, a national health care consulting firm, determined that senior citizens can reduce the risk of AMD through daily intake of six to 10 milligrams of lutein with zeaxanthin. They estimate a resulting \$2.5 billion in health care savings over five years (2006

to 2010). In that time, supplements containing lutein with zeaxanthin could help an estimated 98,000 people avoid the dependence that accompanies AMD-related vision loss.

Lutein has become increasingly popular in the last decade and is now included in most multivitamins. Zeaxanthin, recently recognized as an important nutrient, is rapidly becoming more available. Studies indicate it is particularly important for women or anyone with extra body fat.

Natural zeaxanthin and lutein are produced from marigold flowers. According to Philip Gowaski of Chrysantis, Inc., a company that produces natural zeaxanthin for use in supplements, “The flower produces these compounds in the same form that's found in brightly colored foods like corn, green leafy vegetables and oranges, guaranteeing its effective use by the body.”

Several scientific studies have been published in recent years supporting the benefits of supplements like zeaxanthin in maintaining eye health, with more in the works, including a very large, multiple-year, government-funded study. Researchers are seeing strong evidence that zeaxanthin can help lower the risk of cataracts as well as AMD. “We already know enough to say that people with high levels of carotenoids such as zeaxanthin will have an extended functional lifetime for their vision,” said Dr. Landrum.