

LIFE AFTER 50

MARCH 2010

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COOKING, EATING, AND LIVING WELL

WITH NUTRITION EXPERT JACKIE KELLER



Current research shows that nearly one out of four Americans over the age of 40 suffer from age-related macular degeneration or cataracts, the two leading causes of vision loss and blindness. But, it's far from inevitable, as basic and clinical research has proven that nutrients in eye-healthy foods can slow vision loss. Optometrist Stuart Richter, a vision and nutrition expert with the American Optometric Association agrees that our diets can have a major impact on our vision. "In some cases, foods can even improve vision while providing additional health benefits to the patient," says Richter.

Here are five tips to help you eat optimally for eye health:

1 Of about 20 carotenoids found in human blood, only lutein and zeaxanthin are found in the visual system. These naturally occurring carotenoids that are responsible for helping to protect the eyes from oxidative stress and high-energy light are often found together and in dark leafy greens. Collard greens are a good source of natural zeaxanthin. You can also find good sources of both lutein and zeaxanthin in other dark leafy greens like spinach, chard and kale. Add one cup of cooked spinach per day to your diet each day for 10 mg of lutein.

2 Omega-3 fats are favorable fats found in flax seeds and tuna, salmon and sardines. There are many health benefits to these essential, polyunsaturated fatty acids including a reduced risk of age-related macular degeneration and better vision.

3 Vitamin C, found in brightly colored fruits and vegetables, is a water-soluble vitamin that (in high doses) can help reduce the risk of cataracts. Reach for the deepest-colored bell peppers, broccoli, strawberries, and citrus fruits to augment your meals and snacks. Don't forget those all-important carrots – tried and true, they really are great for you. To ensure that you're getting enough vitamin C, add one cup of calcium fortified orange juice to your daily meal plan. OJ contains more than 80 milligrams per serving of this important vitamin, more than enough to help offset some eye diseases.

4 Zinc, an essential mineral found in many lean meats (turkey, red meat, oysters, nuts, beans and fortified cereals) is important for maintaining nearly every cell in the body, and for maintaining the senses of taste and smell. Zinc is also found in the retina, and helps the functioning of enzymes responsible for eye health. Pick up a package of turkey, or for something unusual, frozen ostrich meat for a zinc-rich change of pace.

5 Vitamin E, the collective name of a set of fat-soluble vitamins with antioxidant properties, may also help prevent cataracts and delay macular degeneration. Try snacking on small servings of natural peanut butter (1 tablespoon is the serving size), baked sweet potatoes (1/2 cup cooked is the serving size), sunflower seeds or almonds (1 ounce portions) for an eye-healthy treat.

Drinking plenty of water is also important for overall health and vision. Aim for eight (eight-ounce) glasses per day.

Finally, don't forget to wear shades. Eyes are very sensitive to UV radiation, so wearing sunglasses offers protection from the sun, and as a side benefit, will help minimize those wrinkles and lines that come from squinting. ■

MARCH IS "SAVE YOUR VISION MONTH" AND "NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH", SO THERE'S NO BETTER TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEEING WELL AND EATING WELL.

Jackie Keller holds a Bachelor of Science degree from USC, and received her culinary training from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, France. She is a nutrition expert and the founding director of NutriFit, L.A.'s premiere healthy food company. You can learn more about Jackie and contact her via her Web sites: www.nutritifitonline.com and www.JackieKeller.com, or by phone at: (310) 473-1989.