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Eat for Your Eyes

You probably don't hear a lot about the connection between your vision and what's on your plate. That doesn't mean there is none. In fact, the evidence is growing that not only does what you eat affect how well you see, by changing your diet you might even be able to reverse some early vision loss!

AMD, or age-related macular degeneration, is the leading cause of blindness in persons over the age of 55. There is no cure. Treatment is difficult and not entirely effective. Women are more likely to get it than men. Smokers have a higher risk too. Blue-eyed people are more likely to suffer from AMD than dark-eyed, probably because a dark iris keeps more of the sun's damaging rays out of the eye. So it makes sense that people who don't use sunglasses and those who spend a lot of time out in the sun are also at high risk.

The good news is that a good diet helps prevent it and slows down how fast it goes from mild to blindness. The right diet might even improve the vision of people who all ready have some vision loss.

You're probably familiar with antioxidants. The important ones for eyes are vitamins C, E and A, helping to prevent damage. Fruits and vegetables, whole grains and healthy oils all provide these. But don't depend on vitamin pills, eat the real foods to get them. Why?

Because not all antioxidants are vitamins. Many yellow, orange and red pigments in foods also provide protection. A few of these are turned into vitamin A by our bodies. Lutein, lycopene and zeaxanthin do not make vitamin A, but were found to

be very important for eye health. Diets high in these even seem able to reverse early symptoms of AMD vision loss. More good news - we actually get more from cooked or canned vegetables than we do from raw ones. And a little bit of fat (margarine or oil) helps us absorb them more quickly.

So, if it's easier for you to thaw a pack of frozen spinach, do it! Do you want to just open a can of turnip greens? Go for it! Other good sources are kale and collard greens. Dark romaine lettuce, broccoli, even green peas and corn have lutein and zeaxanthin. Carrots and papayas have a little bit too.

There are no official recommendations about how much lutein we need, but very few of us probably get enough. Lutein supplements might help, but talk to your doctor first. Some supplements contain other ingredients that you might need to avoid. But there are no known dangers from eating plenty of vegetables and fruits. Chow down!

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