

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Strange as it may seem, the latest research on eye health and preventing cataracts started when a researcher looked at a rotting apple! It could only be someone who was all ready studying eye health to recognize that the process that makes an apple turn brown when it's cut seems to be the same process that causes the clouding in cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (or AMD). But it seems that both are caused by oxidation of sugars. At least that's the report from Tufts University and the USDA Center on Aging.

Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness in people over 75 years old. About 1 in every 3 people develops it. It occurs when cells in the back of our eyes that give us vision for details stop working. Sometimes this happens because blood vessels leak and move the cells. Sometimes the cells just stop working. In either case we can't see well anymore. At first things might just look blurry, or we might have a blurry spot. Maybe we just seem to need more light to be able to read. Cataracts occur when the clear front of our eye gets cloudy. Then the light can't get in. Again, things start to look fuzzy. This happens very commonly as we age. But no one ever thought to connect it with what we eat until recently.

Looking at over 10 years of studies and medical exams, medical researchers saw that women who ate more white sugar, white starch and refined starches were much more likely to develop cataracts or age-related macular degeneration. The more

refined starches the women ate, the earlier they were to develop eye problems too. The connections didn't depend on how much starch or sugar the women ate, just what kind of starches they usually ate.

A second set of studies looked at many more people, almost 9000 men and women and found the same connections. Those doctors said that if these people had been eating more whole grains and higher fiber foods almost 20% of the macular degeneration cases would never have happened. One out of 5 people would still have their full vision! That's a big difference in our health and quality of life!

So far there is no good research saying that once we lose our vision our diet could bring it back. But the evidence keeps getting stronger that by eating well now we could keep our vision a lot longer. What does 'eating well' mean for eye health?

First, go for whole grains and higher fiber foods. Fiber is only found in plant foods, and the less refined they are, the more fiber there probably is. So try to eat as much of your grain products as whole grain as you can. Whole wheat pasta, whole wheat bread, brown rice, barley and oatmeal are all good ways to get whole grains.

Stay away from food and drinks with lots of plain sugar. It doesn't matter if it's white sugar, brown sugar, cane sugar or corn syrup. When any plant has been refined to produce sugar or syrup, the fiber and most of the other nutrients have been taken away. Choose vegetables with lots of starch less often. A potato once in a while won't kill you, but potatoes or white rice every day are not going to help. Fill up on more leafy greens, corn, peas and beans, any other vegetable or fruit instead of plain starch. Spread the peanut butter on apple slices instead of a bagel!

Here's a veggie pie to use those fresh Florida tomatoes that are on their way.

The tomato slices become the crust, so there's no flour at all. Eye candy for sure!

Tomato and Squash Tart

1 pound ripe tomatoes

1 pound zucchini or yellow squash

1 medium potato, peeled

1/4 cup chopped onion

2 eggs or egg substitute

1 cup shredded Swiss cheese, low fat

1 tsp salt

½ tsp Italian seasoning

1/4 tsp ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 400° F. Wash tomatoes and zucchini. Cut tomatoes in half through stem, then cut halves crossways into thin slices. Cut potatoes and zucchini in half, then cut halves into thin slices. Combine zucchini, potato, eggs, 3/4 cup of cheese and seasonings in bowl and mix well. Spray a 9 inch pie plate with cooking spray. Arrange half the tomato slices in plate to cover bottom. Spoon zucchini mixture over and press down slightly. Arrange rest of tomatoes on top, then sprinkle with last 1/4 cup of cheese. Bake for 40 minutes. Serves 8.

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