

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

Seeing with Green

If you know anyone who has lost or is losing their vision, chances are good that they're suffering from AMD. They might have complications of diabetes, but they may well have Age-related Macular Degeneration (it's easier to say AMD). It is the leading cause of blindness in persons over age 50, with an estimated 30 million people world-wide suffering from it. Unfortunately there is no cure, and no easy treatment either. But the evidence is growing that there is a way to avoid it, or at least slow down its development if someone all ready has the first stages. And, you guessed, it involves diet!

There are different kinds of AMD. The eye starts with the 'dry' or early kind. It only causes a slight loss or disruption of vision, so little that many people don't notice it. But when little bits of fat start building up in the back of the eye, that's the start of AMD. Some people can stay in the early stages for years. Or, for reasons that are not understood, some people's eyes zip through the 4 early stages and go on to the final late stage in less than a year.

That late stage is called 'wet' AMD, because now, in addition to the fatty lumps in the eye, there are blisters and new blood vessels too. The blisters cause scarring, and where there are scars there is no vision. A person with wet AMD will have a black spot in the center of their vision, and the edges of the vision will be wavy. Complete blindness can be the final stage.

Who's at risk? The older we are, the more sunlight we've been exposed to, the higher our risk. Pretty blue eyes have a higher risk than brown eyes. People who smoke, and those who don't wear sunglasses are at higher risk. Women have more risk than men do. And, people who don't eat their greens have a higher risk!

Many vegetables and fruits give us vitamins, especially A, E and C. These three are all antioxidants. They help to neutralize the effects of years of sunlight on our eyes. But there are other chemicals in dark green, red and yellow veggies that give us especially strong protection. Actually the chemicals that help make those vegetables dark yellow, orange or red are the ones we need, those pigments.

The main green and yellow compounds are called lutein, alpha and beta-carotenes and zeaxanthin. The veggies with the most are kale, spinach, turnip and collard greens. Green peas and corn have enough color in their skins to be decent sources, but broccoli and dark romaine lettuce are better. Eggs, carrots and papaya are good too. The red one called lycopene is found in watermelon, tomatoes and strawberries. One interesting fact is that we are able to absorb more of these active ingredients from cooked or canned vegetables than from raw or just steamed veggies. And, we need a little fat with them to absorb well.

There is no official recommendation for how much we need, but most Americans probably don't get nearly enough. Studies do show that increasing lutein in the diet can improve vision and slow the progression of the disease. At least one study showed that eating plenty of lutein maybe even reversed the symptoms of AMD.

If we ate the recommended 9 to 12 servings of fruits and vegetables a day we'd be better off. There are supplements on the market and some bottled drinks have

added lutein too. But do not start taking these megadoses of lutein and antioxidants without talking to your doctor! They only seem to help people who all ready have a moderate level of vision loss, and they can make other diseases worse. If you don't have AMD, eat your veggies to protect yourself, starting now!

Here's a simple way to prepare dark greens. You can use kale or collard greens. Use a package of prewashed greens for super quick preparation. If you really want a little meaty flavor with them add some chopped Canadian bacon to the skillet. It has the least fat for the flavor you'll get. And feel free to add a couple dashes of hot sauce if that's what your family likes. You'll see better for it!

Sautéed Greens

1 bunch (about 3/4 pound) dark greens	2 Tbsp vegetable oil
1/3 medium head cabbage, sliced	1 clove garlic, minced
1 medium onion, quartered and sliced	2 tsp vinegar or lemon juice

Rinse and coarsely shred the greens. Boil 3 qts water in large pot. Add the greens and boil 3-4 minutes. Scoop out greens, add cabbage and boil 1 minute. Drain both in a colander. Heat oil in large skillet. Sauté garlic and onions 3-4 minutes. Add greens and cabbage, sauté 3 minutes more. Add vinegar (and hot sauce if using). Toss and serve. Serves 6.

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