

# Patient Focus

April-May 2013

## Vision and Heart Healthy Foods

A diet low in fat and rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can pay benefits not only to your heart but to your eyes. The connection isn't surprising: your eyes rely on tiny arteries for oxygen and nutrients, just as the heart relies on much larger arteries. You can keep those arteries healthy by including the following colorful foods in your diet.

Dark green, leafy vegetables, like **kale**, are high in lutein and zeaxanthin, two nutrients found in the healthy eye that are believed to lower your risk for age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and cataracts. One large study showed that women who had diets high in lutein were 23 percent less likely to develop cataracts than women whose diets were low in this nutrient. Eggs are also a good source, as are broccoli, peas, and corn.

Some studies suggest that diets rich in omega-3 fatty acid from cold-water fish like **salmon**, tuna, sardines, and halibut reduce the risk of developing eye disease later in life. A 2010 study from Johns Hopkins found that people who had a diet high in omega-3 fatty acid were much less likely to develop AMD.

All citrus fruit, like **oranges** and lemons, are high in vitamin C, an antioxidant that is critical to eye health. Scientists have found that your eyes need relatively high levels of this vitamin to function properly and antioxidants can prevent or at least delay cataracts and AMD. Other foods that offer the same benefits include peaches, red peppers, tomatoes, and strawberries.

Legumes of all kinds (**black-eyed peas**, lima beans, and peanuts) contain zinc, an essential trace mineral that is found in high concentration in the eyes. Zinc may help protect your eyes from the damaging effects of light. Other foods high in zinc include oysters, lean red meat, poultry, and fortified cereals.

**Carrots** are high in beta-carotene, a nutrient that helps with night vision, as are other orange-colored fruits and vegetables like sweet potatoes, apricots, and cantaloupe.

Source: [www.geteyesmart.org](http://www.geteyesmart.org)



## Women's Eye Health

**Women's Eye Health.org** was formed in response to the troubling reality that two-thirds of the world's population of blind and visually impaired persons are women and many of them are living in underdeveloped countries. The organization's mission is to educate people regarding those eye diseases that:

- Are intrinsically more prevalent in women
- Occur more often in women because they live longer than men
- Are exacerbated by nutritional habits, smoking, and/or environmental insult

Of the common eye diseases, dry eye syndrome, autoimmune diseases, and certain forms of cataract are more prevalent in women. Women in industrialized nations tend to live longer than men and develop more age-related afflictions. In developing countries, infectious diseases such as trachoma are more prevalent in women and, in some areas of the world, women have less access to medical care.

Trachoma, the world's leading cause of preventable blindness, occurs after years of repeated infection with a microorganism, *Chlamydia trachomatis*. The infection and re-infection process begins in early childhood and may continue to adulthood because as mothers, grandmothers, and older sisters who care for children are excessively and continually exposed to the bacterium. Crowded living conditions, lack of sufficient water and sanitation services, and contact with flies and fly-breeding sites near homes are some of the many risk factors for development of trachoma. It is transmitted by contact with ocular and respiratory secretions.

As a result of repeated infections and inflammation, scarring develops on the inside of the eyelid and the eyelashes eventually turn inward. As the eyelid turns inward, eye lashes begin to scratch and create scars on the cornea.



This leads to severe vision loss and eventually blindness, often in relatively young adults.

As the education and economic welfare of a community rises, trachoma decreases. The World Health Organization (WHO) along with the Alliance for Global Elimination of Trachoma by the year 2020 has adopted the "SAFE" strategy to combat this infection. It includes:

**S**urgery - to correct end-stage disease

**A**ntibiotic treatment

**F**acial cleanliness - frequent face washing

**E**nvironmental improvement - improved water supply and sanitation facilities

It has been estimated that 75% of blindness and vision loss is either preventable or treatable. You can optimize your eye health by practicing a healthy lifestyle, having regular eye exams, and protecting your eyes from injury.

Source: Women's Eye Health.org



*For an appointment, please call  
717-531-5690*

Next month's issue will focus on the results of the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS)