

Check Out These Vision-Friendly Veggies

You've probably heard that carrots are good for your eyes. But they're not the only sight-saving vegetable around town. Look no further than your local traffic light to see the best colors for eye health. Research shows that eating certain *red*, *yellow* and *green* veggies may decrease the risk of cataracts and macular degeneration, leading causes of vision loss.

A cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye due to damaged proteins in the lens. It usually develops gradually over a number of years. More than half of Americans over age 80 are affected, with more than two million cataract extraction surgeries performed each year. Exposure to radiation from the sun over time contributes to cataracts.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is loss of central vision you need to see people's faces or words in a book. The macula is the center part of the retina that is responsible for focusing on fine details. In AMD, the macula deteriorates and leads to a central blind spot.

Traffic Light Colors Might Help

Red, yellow and green vegetables may protect eye health because of their powerful antioxidants that help remove disease-causing free radicals from the body, including the eyes. Studies show that vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin may protect against vision loss from cataracts and/or AMD. It turns out that many veggies in traffic light colors are rich in some or all of these nutrients, making them super foods for your eyes.

Look at Vitamins C and E

All three of these nutrients are antioxidants, which means they fight oxidative stress put on our cells by free radicals.

Results of studies involving these nutrients and eye protection have been perplexing. Some studies show that eating foods high in vitamin C, vitamin E and beta-carotene helps decrease the chance of vision loss or slow its progression. But research using vitamin pills has been perplexing, showing that taking vitamin C or E supplements helps some people but in others might even increase the risk. Bottom line for eye health? Getting your nutrients from whole foods is probably best.

Zinc and Omega-3 Fats

The mineral zinc is important for eye health. Zinc is found in meat, poultry, dairy, nuts and seeds. Omega-3 fats found in fish oil may also protect against AMD.

Lutein and Zeaxanthin

Lutein and zeaxanthin are naturally-occurring pigments in plants that protect the eyes like a sunscreen shields the skin. Remember the center of the retina called the macula? These two pigments accumulate in the tissues of the macula where they filter out blue light, which is harmful to the eyes. Scientists think this sunscreen effect may play a role in preventing AMD. The theory is that the more lutein and zeaxanthin you get from your diet, the more protective pigment in your macula.

Several large studies showed that people who ate lots of lutein-rich foods had lower risk of getting cataracts than people who ate hardly any lutein. Interestingly, lutein and zeaxanthin are almost always found together in foods and a surprising source is egg yolks. Although the amount in eggs is small, research suggests these nutrients are absorbed better from eggs than from richer plant sources.

Best Vegetable in sight

Of all the traffic light veggies, broccoli and broccoli sprouts might be the best choice in sight. They have an extra antioxidant called sulforaphane which protects eyes from the

sun's damaging ultraviolet rays. In one lab study, the more sulforaphane human retinal cells received, the more protected they were from oxidative damage that can lead to vision loss.

Your eyesight is priceless. To improve the chances of reading, driving and seeing the faces of your loved ones for many years to come, try these **sight-saving tips**:

- Wear sunglasses that block 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays. Since sunlight comes in from all angles, a wide-brimmed hat is helpful, too.
- See your eye doctor for checkups on a regular basis.
- Don't smoke. Smoking contributes to both cataracts and AMD.
- Eat a variety of traffic-light-colored fruits and vegetables each day.

Bright reds: tomato, red bell pepper

Golden yellows: corn, sweet potato, carrots, squash, pumpkin, cantaloupe, peaches, papaya, mango

Dark greens: broccoli, broccoli sprouts, spinach, peas, green bell peppers, all kinds of greens such as collard and turnip, avocado

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