

5 Top Foods for Eye Health

You've heard the expression, "The eyes have it." But do your eyes have all the nutrients they need to help prevent cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma and other sight woes? To get a glimpse of the top foods for eye health, we talked with Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics spokesperson Judy Caplan, RDN, to make certain our eyes do have it.

Kale & Collards: See the Light

These leafy greens are a rich source of lutein and zeaxanthin, which are related to vitamin A and beta carotene, and are believed to protect eye tissues from sunlight damage and reduce the risk of cataracts and macular degeneration.

Other good sources of these peeper-friendly nutrients include dark green leafy vegetables like collard greens, turnip greens and spinach, broccoli, peas, kiwi, red grapes, yellow squash, oranges, corn, mangoes and honeydew melon.

Your body needs fat to absorb lutein and zeaxanthin, so be sure to eat them with a bit of healthy fat such as a drizzle of olive oil.

And kale isn't just a one-note food — it contains vitamin C and beta carotene, other eye-friendly nutrients.

Sweet Potatoes & Carrots: The Color of Health

These orange tubers are a good source of beta carotene, which may slow progress of macular degeneration. Your body converts beta carotene to vitamin A, a nutrient that helps prevent dry eyes and night blindness. Beta carotene and vitamin A also help fight off eye infections.

Sweet potatoes not your favorite? For beta carotene, try other deep orange foods, which include carrots and butternut squash, plus dark green foods including spinach and collard greens. And liver, milk and eggs are other great sources of vitamin A.

But don't count on popping a pill to get these nutrients — your best sources of vitamins and antioxidants are from whole foods, since it may be a food's combination of nutrients that have a healing effect.

And, like lutein and zeaxanthin, beta carotene and vitamin A are absorbed best when eaten with a little healthy fat such as olive oil.



Strawberries: Help You "C" Better

Fresh, juicy strawberries are a good thing for your eyes, and contain plenty of vitamin C, which is an antioxidant that can help lower your risk of cataracts.

Also, be sure to load up your plate with other vitamin C-rich foods including bell peppers, broccoli, citrus (such as orange and grapefruit) and cantaloupe.

Salmon: Goodbye, Dry Eyes

Dry eyes? Omega-3 fatty acids can help alleviate the problem. Get some healthy fats every day in the form of salmon (two to three times per week), walnuts (which also include eye-healthy vitamin E), avocado, olive oil, flax seed and olives.

Salmon is also a good source of vitamin D, which helps protect against macular degeneration. You can also get vitamin D by downing sardines, mackerel, milk and orange juice fortified with vitamin D.

Green Tea: Antioxidant Powerhouse

A cup of green tea is more than relaxing and delicious — its antioxidants may help lower risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration.

In a study reported in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, researchers fed rats green tea extract and then examined which tissues of the eye had absorbed the most catechins — a class of antioxidants. The results? The retina, a light-sensitive layer of tissue that lines the inner surface of the eye, had the highest concentration of catechins. It's good news that eye tissue can absorb the antioxidants from green tea, but studies on humans will need to be done to determine its effects.

Other foods that are high in catechins include red wine, chocolate, berries and apples. Black tea also boasts catechins, but in lower amounts than its green cousin. The antioxidants in tea are present in largest quantities within 4-6 hours of brewing

How will you fit these foods into your eating plan? One tip is to replace less nutritious foods with the foods listed above. Try one of the se easy switches:

- Drink a glass of freshly prepared, lightly sweetened green tea (1 tsp per cup) instead of a buying a presweetened tea or soda.
- Have strawberries as a snack or dessert instead of a bakery item
- Try our recipe of the month Beans and Greens with a small piece of salmon
- Try sweet potato oven fries instead of regular French fries.

Source: adapted from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

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