

Dietitians Dish: Help prevent cataracts with proper nutrition

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By Kathryn Steve

August is Cataracts Awareness Month and according to the National Eye Institute, more than half of Americans by age 80 have been diagnosed with cataracts or had cataract surgery.

Cataracts is the clouding of the normally clear lens of your eye, which will cause the person to see distorted or blurred objects and it is the most common cause of blindness. It tends to develop slowly and, if not treated, will usually become worse over time.

The main cause for the development of cataracts is aging or injury to the eye tissue. Some are caused by smoking, genetic disorders or other health problems, such as diabetes or high blood pressure. There are ways to prevent cataracts, such as getting regular eye exams, quitting smoking, wearing sunglasses and maintaining a healthy weight.

What you eat can also help prevent cataracts, as well as macular degeneration and glaucoma. Being that this is Dietitian's Dish, you had to see that coming right?

Antioxidants, such as vitamin E and vitamin C, have been shown to help lower the rate of cataracts and vitamin A, lutein and zeaxanthin are three compounds found in food that are essential for good eye health.

Vitamin E is a fat-soluble vitamin, and its main role in the body is to protect against cell damage. Foods naturally rich in vitamin E include wheat germ, whole-grain foods, seeds (especially sunflower), peanut butter, nuts (especially hazelnuts and almonds) and dark leafy, green vegetables, such as spinach.

Vitamin C is probably the best-known vitamin that offers a wide-variety of health benefits. Foods high in vitamin C include citrus fruits (grapefruit, oranges, limes, etc.), strawberries, mangos, tomatoes, broccoli and sweet peppers.

Vitamin A promotes normal vision and helps people see in the dark. Sweet potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, papayas, apricots, peaches, milk, liver and egg yolks are good examples of vitamin A rich foods.

Both lutein and zeaxanthin help keep the lens, retina and the pigment of the central area of the eye healthy. They can be found in dark green leafy vegetables, peas, yellow squash, broccoli, kiwi, mangos and oranges.

Eating the foods and vitamins mentioned will not only help your eye health, but your overall health as well. So no matter what you do try to eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day, choose whole-grain foods, leaner meats and avoid salt.

Kathryn Steve is a registered and licensed dietitian. Send questions or comments to dietitians@vicad.com.

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