

Information from Dr. Vincent C. Yu Vitamin & Mineral Supplements and Your Eyes

Scientists have long debated whether taking vitamin and/or mineral supplements could help prevent, treat, or cure certain eye conditions. Some early scientific studies seemed to show that supplements had the potential to prevent or slow the progression of cataract and age-related macular degeneration (AMD), although more complete study was needed to answer some important questions.

A more recent study, the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), sought to address these questions, and seems to have given us some of the answers.

What is AREDS?

The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) is a major study sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI), one of the federal government's National Institutes of Health, conducted at 11 major medical center research facilities around the country.

What were the Results?

The study showed a number of important things:

- High levels of antioxidants and zinc can reduce the risk of vision loss from advanced AMD by about 19 % in high-risk patients (patients with intermediate AMD, or advanced AMD in one eye but not the other).
- Supplements do not provide significant benefit to patients with minimal AMD.
- These nutritional supplements do not prevent the initial development of AMD, nor do they improve vision already lost to AMD.
- Nutritional supplements do not seem to prevent cataracts, or to keep them from getting worse over time.
- While most patients in the study experienced no serious side-effects from the doses of zinc and antioxidants used, a few taking zinc alone had urinary tract problems that required hospitalization. Some patients taking large doses of antioxidants experienced some yellowing of the skin. The long-term effects of taking large doses of these supplements are still unknown.

Read next page

Should I Take Nutritional Supplements?

If you have intermediate (or advanced AMD in one eye only), talk to your physician about taking nutritional supplements. He or she can help you determine if they may be beneficial and safe for you, and what types and doses of supplements to take. The doses used in the study were:

- Vitamin C 500 mg
- Vitamin E 400 IU
- Beta-carotene 15 mg
- Zinc 80 mg, as zinc oxide
- Copper 2 mg, as cupric oxide (copper should be take with zinc, because high-dose zinc is associated with copper deficiency)

**Please note that many of the commercially available combination preparations marketed as eye supplements, may not contain these high dosages. It is possible that the lower dosages contained in some of the commercial combination preparations may confer the same protective effects of the high dosages, but the study only examined the effect of higher dosage supplementation. It is very important to talk with your primary care physician before taking large-dose supplements, and to follow his or her dosage recommendations carefully. Some supplements may interfere with each other or other medications. Smokers and ex-smokers probably should not take beta-carotene, as studies have shown a link between beta-carotene and lung cancer among smokers.