



See Your Way to Better Vision with Antioxidants

by Steven Horne

Millions of Americans have sung the question, "Oh say, can you see?" Unfortunately, for many millions of senior citizens, the answer to that question is, "No." That's because diseases like cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration rob thousands of people of their vision every year.

The sad thing is that one simple nutritional change could save many people's vision. That change is to get more antioxidant nutrients into the diet. Antioxidants are extremely critical to eye health because the eyes are extremely prone to oxidative stress and free radical damage. In fact, oxidative stress is the underlying cause of cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration.

In Chinese medicine, a connection was seen between the eyes and the liver. That is to say that TCM practitioners observed that the health of the eyes was connected to the health of the liver. One aspect of this connections is that both the eyes and the liver require high levels of antioxidant nutrients to function properly. So, if antioxidant levels are low, both tissues will be adversely affected.

There are two reasons the eyes need a good supply of antioxidants to stay healthy. The first is simple, sunlight can cause free radical damage. That's why excessive sunbathing can damage the skin. So, because the eyes are designed to take in light and be sensitive to it, they are especially prone to being damaged. Antioxidant nutrients protect the eyes from this damage.

The second reason the eyes need a lot of antioxidants is because they are very active, constantly sending millions of bits of information to the brain. This requires a high metabolism (the process the body uses to create energy) and metabolism also creates free radicals. So, organs with higher metabolic rates, like the eyes and the liver, also need more antioxidants.

Let Your Eyes Guide You to Better Nutrition

So, you might ask, "How do I make this simple change and get more antioxidants into your diet?" The answer is to let your eyes guide you. You see, the bright colors of various fruits and vegetables signal the presence of various antioxidants. So, as you shop for food, you should look for bright colored fruits and vegetables and eat them every day. In other words, you should eat a rainbow of foods whose colors please your eyes as much as their flavors please your taste buds.

For example, lutein and zeaxanthin, are yellowish pigments found in foods like spinach, kale, green beans, corn and egg yolks. They are also antioxidants that protect your eyes from the blue and near-ultraviolet wavelengths of light. Protecting the eyes from these wavelengths of light reduces the risk of macular degeneration.

Carrots are high in beta-carotene, a precursor to vitamin A. Both vitamin A and beta-carotene

are very critical antioxidants for the eyes, meaning there is some truth to the popular belief that carrots are good for your eyes.

There are other carotenoids that protect the eyes, too. For instance, lycopene, a carotenoid that contributes to the red color of tomatoes, helps protect eyes from light and oxygen damage. It also protects the prostate and blood vessels.

The dark purple color of blueberries, huckleberries and bilberries is due to the presence of anthocyanodins. These compounds protect blood vessels in the eyes (and throughout the body) and enhance night vision.

The bottom line is that our eyes can help to guide our nutritional choices, so we obtain the nutrients our eyes need to stay healthy. An ingenious system, don't you think?

Antioxidant Supplements

Antioxidant supplements are the "big thing" right now, but it's important to remember that foods contain extremely complex mixtures of nutrients that isolated supplements will never be able to duplicate. So, it's very important that you "eat" your antioxidants in the form of fresh fruits and vegetables, and not rely strictly on supplements. Besides, colorful food is a lot more fun to ingest than pills.

Still, there are antioxidant supplements that provide an added boost to protecting the eyes. For general antioxidant protection, which will benefit the whole body, not just the eyes, consider supplements like Thai-Go and Super ORAC.

Nature's Sunshine's Milk Thistle Combination is a great antioxidant for the liver, which means it will also help the eyes. It contains N-acetyl cysteine, a compound that increases levels of an intracellular antioxidant called glutathione. People with cataracts tend to be deficient in glutathione.

Since carotenoids are so important for the eyes, Nature's Sunshine Products' Carotenoid Blend is another antioxidant that can help to keep you seeing the world clearly. It contains beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, lutein, lycopene, zeaxanthin, cryptoxanthin, phytoene, phytofluene and astaxanthin.

For more specific protection for the eyes consider Nature's Sunshine Products' Perfect Eyes, which contains the carotenoids lutein, zeaxanthin, beta-carotene and lycopene. In addition, it contains the herbs bilberry and turmeric, which have powerful anti-inflammatory properties that protect the eyes, liver, blood vessels and other tissues from damage. Perfect Eyes also contains n-acetyl cysteine, taurine, selenium, zinc, quercetin and hesperidin.