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THE MAGNIFIER Issue #48, October 30, 2006

Newsletter from the Macular Degeneration Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 531313 Henderson, NV 89053
<http://www.eyesight.org>

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Protecting Yourself from Macular Degeneration
Aug 21, 2006 05:00 PM PST WFIE-TV - Evansville,IN,USA
Reporter: Shannon Samson New Media Producer: Rachel Chambliss

"Four years ago, 81-year-old artist Rosemary Kohler was prepared to put down her paintbrush for good. She recalls, "I felt as if I had lost at least 50 percent of my eyesight in about a month."

Eighty-five-year-old Joyce McMinn found herself unable to see the road. She says, "It just seemed like it happened so fast." Both women were diagnosed with macular degeneration - an eye disease that strips away your central vision.

Dr. Redmer van Leeuwen says there are no effective approved treatments for MD. That's why the findings of his new study on preventing the disease are so exciting. Dr. van Leeuwen explains, "Patients, who had a diet rich in vitamin E and zinc, had an almost 40 percent lower risk of getting the early signs of macular degeneration." Vitamin E is found in high levels in vegetable oils, nuts and leafy green vegetables. Good sources of zinc are whole grain bread, eggs, dairy products and meat.

Other ways to reduce your risk? Wear sunglasses that block blue light, consume less packaged foods and don't smoke. Dr. van Leeuwen adds, 'So if you smoke, your risk of MD is almost fourfold!' An ounce of prevention seems to be just what the doctor ordered; especially, when there is no cure. People with light skin and eyes are at the highest risk for developing macular degeneration."

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What are some current issues and controversies about vitamin A?
<http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov/factsheets/vitamina.asp#en33>

Vitamin A, beta carotene, and cancer:

Dietary intake studies suggest an association between diets rich in beta-carotene and vitamin A and a lower risk of many types of cancer. A higher intake of green and yellow vegetables or other food sources of beta carotene and/or vitamin A may decrease the risk of lung cancer.

However, a number of studies that tested the role of beta-carotene supplements in cancer prevention did not find them to protect against the disease. In the Alpha-Tocopherol Beta-Carotene (ATBC) Cancer Prevention Study, more than 29,000 men who regularly smoked cigarettes were randomized to receive 20 mg beta-carotene alone, 50 mg alpha-tocopherol alone, supplements of both, or a placebo for 5 to 8 years. Incidence of lung cancer was 18% higher among men who took the beta-carotene supplement. Eight percent more men in this group died, as compared to those receiving other treatments or placebo. Similar results were seen in the Carotene and Retinol Efficacy Trial (CARET), a lung cancer chemo-prevention study that provided subjects with supplements of 30 mg beta-carotene and 25,000 IU retinyl palmitate (a form of vitamin A) or a placebo. This study was stopped after researchers discovered that subjects receiving beta-carotene had a 46% higher risk of dying from lung cancer.

The Institute of Medicine states "beta-carotene supplements are not advisable for the general population."

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OXIDATIVE DAMAGE

Lately much attention is being paid to topics like free radicals, antioxidants and oxidative damage. Understanding these terms will help to make sense of the importance of taking certain vitamins and minerals.

To explain these terms we have to start with the atom. All matter is composed of atoms. All atoms have electrons revolving around a nucleus, and ideally they are electrically stable.

If an electron gets "knocked off" the atom, it becomes unstable and electrically charged, it is then called a free radical. To become stabilized again, a free radical must "steal" its missing electron from another molecule. When the electron is stolen from an invader (like a bacteria or virus), the invader's molecular structure is damaged, which leads to its death (as intended by the immune system). When there are no invaders left to destroy, free radicals then turn to the only other source from which they

can steal electrons - healthy cells. The prolonged state of free radicals damaging healthy cells and tissue is called chronic inflammation, or oxidative stress.

Using more oxygen than any other cell in the body (including the heart or the brain), the retina is in a category all by itself when it comes to the dangers of oxidative stress and free radicals. Antioxidants, in the form of certain vitamins and minerals, provide the "extra" electrons that free radicals need to become stabilized again. Different vitamins protect different cells or tissues of the eye.

Two of the most important vitamins for protection from ultraviolet rays are lutein and zeaxanthin. They form the yellow pigment in the macula of the retina which shields it from damaging UV rays. In 2001 the National Eye Institute completed it's Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), and concluded that there was a 25% less advance of macular degeneration when a certain combination of vitamins and minerals were taken.

A 2004 study by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Medical Center Eye Clinic, Chicago, IL, also corroborated these findings. Cigarette smoking, over-consumption of alcohol, dietary factors, and unprotected ultraviolet damage from sunlight, are also potential causes of oxidative damage to the eyes. After age 55 the retina becomes much more susceptible to oxidative problems.

Eye care professionals recommend antioxidant supplements for macular degeneration patients. There are many brands available. If you are looking for a product that contains lutein and zeaxanthin but does not contain beta carotene, we recommend OPTOTABS (800-924-4393).

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CONTACTING MDF

To speak to a support representative directly, you may call 1-888-633-3937. If you reach our voice mail, please speak slowly and distinctly.

ORDERING BOOKS & TAPES

When purchasing items from Amazon.com, please remember to use the MDF search box located at <http://www.eyesight.org/Books/books.html>. By simply originating your search from our website, Amazon rewards the Foundation with a small commission from each product you order. Thank you.

MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS:

Please make checks payable to Macular Degeneration Foundation, Inc., P.O. Box 531313, Henderson, Nevada 89053, or you may use your credit card on our web site <http://www.eyesight.org/Donations/donations.html> . Your contributions make our services available as a support system for macular degeneration patients in the following ways:

1. We provide toll-free lines for personal contact assistance.
2. We mail brochures and other printed materials upon request.
3. We support an award-winning web site that provides the latest up-to-date information.
4. We fund research proposal grants to provide therapies for both the wet and dry form of AMD. Contributions marked "research" are used 100% for research.

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MDF was founded in 1992 by Edmund J. Aleksandrovich Ph.D (a victim of macular degeneration). It provides MD patients and their families with the information necessary to understand the disease, the latest news concerning ways to cope with the disease, and supports the efforts of researchers to find a cure.

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