

Vision for Food:

Eat Healthy

Food is taking center stage in health. Not that food choices weren't always important – your mom told you to eat those veggies for a reason. It's just that there's been an explosion of food-related research that shows the strong connection between food and health.

When it comes to vision and food, growing evidence supports the idea that various vitamins and minerals protect vision for the long haul. And that's more important today than ever before, as the well-publicized "graying of America" marches on.

So, what's the scoop on these vision-protecting nutrients? We talked to an expert to find out. Leland Carr, O.D., is a VSP network doctor and professor of optometry at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma. Dr. Carr also sees patients regularly at several university-run eye clinics.

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“Eating carrots won't make you see better than you already do, but there is a lot of truth in the idea that they can help protect vision,” says Dr. Carr. “Carrots contain a lot of vitamin A, and there have been several studies recently showing that this vitamin – along with vitamins C and E – helps to reduce the impact of both cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

The menu ticket? Eat lots of carrots and green, leafy veggies like spinach and kale, says the doctor. These in particular pack a hefty punch of the key vitamins, and a vision protecting substance called lutein too.

Vitamins A, C and E form a fitting acronym (ACE) when it comes to vision. A major federal study showed that the combo, plus zinc, is a winner when it comes to lowering risk of advanced AMD. Just another reason Dr. Carr touts the importance of “developing good eating habits and taking in the right nutrients” for healthy vision.

“One of the best things you can do for your eyes is to eat a balanced diet high in fruits and vegetables, but also low in saturated fats and sugar,” he adds. “Along with the vitamins, you should be sure to take in adequate amounts of the minerals zinc and selenium, both of which help protect the retina – the light sensitive part of the back of the eye. You also need some fatty acids – usually from fish – to ensure adequate moisture in your eyes. Ask your family doctor if taking food supplements containing these substances is right for you.”

Here's a rundown from Dr. Carr on health choices you should be getting at least three servings per week of – from each group.

- **Vitamin A:** Carrots, kale, spinach, dairy products, egg yolks
- **Vitamin C:** Citrus fruits (especially kiwi fruit) and juices, green peppers, broccoli, potatoes
- **Vitamin E:** Eggs, whole grains, vegetable oils, sunflower seeds
- **Lutein:** Spinach, corn, kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
- **Fatty acids:** Coldwater fish, such as salmon, mackerel and rainbow trout; sunflower oil, corn oil
- **Zinc:** Meat, poultry, fish, whole grains, dairy products