

**NUTRITION & MD**  
**A Guide to Nutrients for Eye Health**

**FACT SHEET**

**Food Is Medicine**

The foods we mention in this fact sheet might not suit your medical conditions. Also, some foods can interact with prescription drugs. So please see your health care professional or a qualified nutritionist before making major changes to your diet.

**Eating and Living for Eye Health**

To halve your risk of developing advanced MD, do several of these:-

- If you smoke, stop
- Eat fish once or more each week
- Eat fresh fruit and vegetables, especially dark
- Green and bright yellow ones
- Eat nuts once or more a week
- If you are overweight, slim down
- Cut right down on commercially baked or deep fried food

The next steps are recommended by many doctors, but not all:-

- If you have MD, supplement your diet with a high dose formula such as MacuVision®. This can reduce the risk of advanced MD by 25%
- Eat less vegetable oil, and cut out margarine

Recent research indicates that a high intake of vegetable oil is linked with MD. The research was conducted in the USA, and we do not yet know how it applies in Australia.

Based on the evidence we have in late 2004, the MD Foundation suggests:

Extra virgin, cold pressed oils are better than refined oils (but do not overheat them when cooking)

The Mediterranean diet is known to be healthy, so it seems likely that olive oil doesn't increase the risk of MD.

The MD Foundation has asked the Australian Government to look at the US research on vegetable oils and to consider revising its publication "Dietary Guidelines for Australians".

**Some Basic Food Chemistry**

When your cells turn food and oxygen into energy, they also produce 'free radicals'. If your system is operating at peak health, these free radicals are neutralised by **antioxidants** before they can cause damage.

Antioxidants are found in fresh fruit and vegetables. Vitamins C & E, zinc, selenium, lutein, zeaxanthin, beta-carotene and bioflavonoids are all anti-oxidants.

EFA (Essential Fatty Acids): These are 'essential' because our bodies cannot manufacture them – they must be obtained from our food.

The two main EFAs are omega 3 and omega 6. You get them by eating fish, nuts and seeds.

**Questions & Answers**

Which Fruit and Vegetables are Best?

All fresh fruits and vegetables are full of antioxidants. Lutein is particularly important, as it is present in high concentrations in the macula. Eat dark green, leafy vegetables such as spinach (one cup of spinach provides a helpful 12mg), and brightly coloured vegetables such as sweet corn and capsicum. Frozen vegetables and dried fruit are fine too.

### **Should I Cook Vegetables or eat them raw?**

**Cooking your vegetables does not alter Lutein** levels, but does help with Lutein absorption, especially if you add a little olive oil when cooking.

### **Which oils might be harmful to eye health?**

Further research is needed – some oils are probably harmless.

### **What is the Best Oil?**

We recommend extra-virgin olive oil. It is classed as ‘fruit’ oil and has been shown to have many health benefits. If you choose a different type of oil, try to get a cold-pressed type.

### **I eat margarine and have high cholesterol – what should I do?**

If you have heart disease or are at high risk of developing it, please seek the advice of your health care provider or nutritionist before applying any of the suggestions contained in this sheet.

### **What sort of fish is best?**

Fish is good for you fresh, frozen or tinned. Oily fish such as salmon, sardines and tuna are especially good sources of omega 3.

### **Which nuts or seeds are best?**

The MD research did not name specific types of nut. However, walnuts, almonds, brazil nuts and pine nuts are high in EFA. Flax seeds (linseeds) are also an excellent source.

### **Can Bilberry or Fish Oil supplements prevent MD?**

It hasn't been studied.

### **I can't eat spinach due to my medications – how can I get enough Lutein?**

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about Lutein supplements.

### **Why are supplements recommended?**

For healthy people, eating a balanced diet is the best way to obtain your nutrients. But where food is used to treat disease, sometimes supplements are the only way to get the specified amounts. For example, to get benefits equal to Macu-Vision® just from your diet you would need to eat 30 oysters, 2 cups of red capsicum and 1400 almonds every day!

### **Summary:**

Eat a wide range of different foods, including lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Eat fish, seeds, nuts and whole grains at least once a week.

If you already have macular degeneration, talk to your health care provider about the possible role of supplements. Don't prescribe supplements for yourself!

If you have a medical condition or if you have been told you are at high risk of heart disease, please discuss your diet with your health care provider.