

NEI Study: Antioxidants and Zinc May Reduce AMD Risk

High levels of antioxidants and zinc may significantly reduce the risk of advanced age-related macular degeneration, according to the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS).

AREDS researchers found that patients at high risk of developing AMD (those with intermediate AMD or advanced AMD in one eye) lowered their risk by about 25% when treated with a high-dose combination of vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene and zinc.

Patients in the same group reduced their risk of vision loss due to advanced AMD by about 19%.

The study also concludes that an increase in the size or number of drusen can heighten one's risk for developing advanced AMD. For example:

- *Early AMD.* Patients with several small drusen or a few medium-sized drusen in one or both eyes do not have vision loss.

- *Intermediate AMD.* Patients with many medium-sized drusen or one or more large drusen in one or both eyes sustain little to no vision loss.

- *Advanced AMD.* Those with many drusen and either abnormal wet or dry variations of AMD may sustain serious vision loss.

Over a period of seven years, researchers in 11 clinical centers across the country examined 4,757 patients ages 55-80 in three stages of the disease: early, intermediate and advanced.

Patients received one of four treatments: zinc alone; antioxidants alone; a combination of antioxidants and zinc; or a placebo.

The nutrients contained 500mg

of vitamin C, 400 international units of vitamin E, 15mg of beta-carotene, 80mg of zinc oxide and 2mg of copper as cupric oxide. Copper was added to the formulations containing zinc to prevent copper deficiency.

Those patients at high risk who were given antioxidants plus zinc had the lowest risk of developing AMD. Those given zinc alone or antioxidants alone reduced their risk as well, but less significantly than the former.

Fredrick Ferris, M.D., director of clinical research at the National Eye Institute and AREDS chairman, says patients with intermediate AMD may not want to take large doses of antioxidant vitamins or zinc due to medical reasons or side effects.

About 7.5% of participants given zinc treatments had urinary tract problems that required hospitalization. A slightly higher rate of anemia was also seen in the groups taking zinc.

At the time the study began, researchers believed that patients with diets rich in antioxidants may have a lower risk of developing cataracts than those whose diets were lacking antioxidants.

The AREDS study showed nutrients to have no significant effect on the development or progression of age-related cataract.

Participants taking zinc alone, antioxidants alone, or a combination of the two were about as likely to develop a cataract as those taking a placebo.

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