

Natural Cataract Prevention

Antioxidants may help delay the onset of cataracts.



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The thought of losing some, if not all, of our eyesight is, frankly, quite scary. For people with cataracts, this could be a reality.

What are cataracts?

A common disorder in the elderly population, cataracts are a clouding of the lens of the eye caused by the breakdown of proteins (or other constituents) by oxidation and photo-oxidation. Aging, ultra-violet (UV) light, free-radical damage (high oxidation status) and diabetes, among others, are risk factors for the development of this disorder. When we are young, proteins in the eye are oxidized but are quickly repaired through the natural healing mechanisms of the body. As we age however, the repair process is not as efficient and damaged proteins may cloud the lens leading to cataracts.

Cataract symptoms

Cataracts are painless and may obstruct your visual field, leading to blurred vision, a loss of central vision and sometimes halos around objects. An ophthalmologist can surgically remove cataracts, with the possibility of a number of post-surgical complications, including blindness. Cataract surgery and follow-up visits account for 3.2 billion dollars annually in the United States.

Antioxidant prevention

Recent data indicate that consuming elevated levels of antioxidants, such as vitamin C, carotenoids and vitamin E, is associated with a delay in the development of various forms of cataracts. One study showed that the intake of vitamin C increases the concentration of vitamin C within the fluid of the eye (fluid within the eyeball) and within the lens. This observation confirmed an antioxidant effect within the eyeball and lens, thereby diminishing the oxidative stress that may lead to the formation of cataracts.

A second study compared the consumption of vitamins by 175 cataract patients with that of 175 individually matched, cataract-free subjects. The results indicated that subjects that were cataract-free consumed significantly more vitamin C and E. The researchers estimated that the observed reduction in risk of cataracts was at least 50%.

A third study examined the relationship between antioxidant nutrient status and cataracts in the elderly. The study evaluated blood concentrations and nutrient intake of vitamin C, vitamin E and carotenoids in 77 subjects with cataracts and in 35 control subjects without cataracts. The results showed that low blood concentrations of carotenoids lead to an increased incidence of cataracts. The results also showed that low blood concentrations of vitamin C lead to a higher incidence of cataracts and that low vitamin C intake was associated with an increased risk of cataracts. Lastly, the researchers observed that subjects who consumed fewer than 3.5 servings of fruit or vegetables per day had an increased risk of cataracts.

Maintain good vision

Thus, it seems that assuring an optimal antioxidant intake can extend lens function, prevent cataracts and help maintain good vision. One author reported that, in the United States, it is estimated that over half of the cataract surgeries and associated costs would be alleviated if the onset of cataracts could be delayed by 10 years. Based on the current research, antioxidants may provide this delay.