



## Overall health keeps vision sharp

Throughout life, we have wonderful experiences as a result of our vision. We enjoy color and form, the pleasure of seeing a friend smile, the power of the ocean waves or the majesty of a sunrise or sunset. But how many times a day do we take our sight for granted?

As young children, we are told to eat our carrots so we will see better. Later, we learn about preventing ultraviolet light damage and wear sunglasses or have our prescription glasses specially coated.

Typically, however, we don't really think much about our vision until around our 40s or 50s when aging leads to difficulty in reading small print.

But the conditions that cause really serious eye problems don't usually develop until later in life in our 60s, 70s, or 80s.

These include: cataracts, the world's leading cause of blindness; age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of irreversible visual loss in the United States; and diabetic retinopathy (DR), a major cause of visual impairment in adults with diabetes.

Many senior citizens have been told to take specially formulated vitamin and mineral supplements

for the eyes. From this, a number of questions arise. Should everybody be taking a nutritional supplement for eyes? And if so, which vitamins and minerals should be taken and at what dosage? Should we be concerned about combining eye vitamins with our other supplements?

After reviewing research literature on nutritional supplements and eye health, we found there is little good definitive research on eye health relating to required amounts of particular nutrients.

What seems to be well established, however, is good eye health is related to good overall health. An increasing number of research studies indicate many health problems are related to poor nutrition. With this in mind, here are our suggestions.

The first best step is to increase the variety of foods in our diets and especially to include more fruits and vegetables. However, it is not unreasonable to include a "basic" multivitamin and mineral pill for overall health and eye health as an "insurance policy". And you don't have to wait until you're 50 to start.

The most common vitamins found in specialized supplements for the eyes are: vitamins A, C, E,

and riboflavin (B2). Vitamin A is sometimes in the precursor form of beta carotene. Occasionally niacin, folate, and vitamin D are also added. The most common minerals are: copper, manganese, selenium, and zinc.

These nutrients, along with other vitamins and minerals, are included in many general vitamin and mineral supplements. Therefore choosing a good overall supplement may be the best way to go rather than one specialized for eyes.

Our search of the available multiple supplements indicated "One-A-Day 50+" brand contained approximately equal concentrations of the nutrients found in the specialized eye supplements plus many other nutrients of importance. This type of supplement is less expensive and provides a broader spectrum of nutrients. The nutrient it doesn't contain is iron.

We know that excessive intake of antioxidant nutrients can be detrimental to health. However, remember to consult your doctor before changing any prescribed vitamins.

---

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D, CNS and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D, CNS  
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.  
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.

---