AMD dietary supplements and Age Related Macular Degeneration

Recent press reports have led to enquiries about the benefits of nutritional supplements for AMD. These reports have followed October 2006 publication of the Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), sponsored by the National Eye Institute, a government funded organisation in the USA.

Findings
The AREDS study found that high levels of certain nutritional supplements reduces:

- Vision loss by 19%
- Risk of advanced AMD by 25%

These nutrients are not a cure for AMD, nor will they restore vision already lost from the disease. However, they could play a role in helping people at high risk from developing advanced AMD.

Should I take nutritional supplements?
You might wish to consider taking nutritional supplements if you have either:

- Large drusen
- Vision loss from AMD in one eye (either wet or dry form)

Your GP can help you determine if they are safe for you.

If I have a few small drusen, should I take the nutrients to prevent disease progression to the intermediate stage?
The study did not demonstrate any benefit to those with early AMD. A dilated eye examination every year can help determine whether the disease is progressing.

Are there reasons for caution in high-dose supplements?
Yes. Self-medication with high doses of vitamins and minerals is not recommended. It is very important to talk to your GP before
taking large-dose supplements, and to follow his or her dosage recommendations carefully. Some supplements could interfere with each other or other medications.

What are the side effects from the AREDS formulation?

While most patients in the study experienced no serious side effects from the doses of zinc and antioxidants used, a few taking zinc alone had urinary tract problems that required hospitalisation. Some patients taking large doses of antioxidants experienced some yellowing of the skin. The long-term effects of taking these supplements are still unknown.

Smokers and ex-smokers should not take beta-carotene, as studies have shown a link between beta-carotene use and lung cancer among smokers.

Daily dosage of the nutrients used in the ARED study
- 500mg of Vitamin C
- 400iu of Vitamin E
- 15mg of beta-carotene
- 80mg of zinc as zinc oxide
- 2mg of copper
- Copper, as cupric oxide, was added to prevent copper deficiency, which could be associated with high levels of zinc supplementation.

Can I get these supplements over the counter?
The formulation used in the ARED study was manufactured by Bausch and Lomb. It will be available in the USA subject to regulatory approval, under the Ocuvite brand name. Current UK formulations available under this brand name, Ocuvite and Ocuvite Extra, differ from that used in the ARED study. It is a non-prescription product. Other companies will probably provide similar formulation. Antioxidant vitamins and zinc can also be purchased separately. Be certain to include copper whenever taking high levels of zinc.

Please discuss the use of these high levels of vitamins and minerals with your GP.

Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Moorfields Direct telephone helpline
Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday to Friday 09.00 to 16.30 for further information and advice.

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