

Terry Talks Nutrition



Preserving Your Vision— For a Lifetime!

currant, which can be potent interventions for everything from the simple problem of eye strain to the serious disease process of macular degeneration. Let's talk about the most serious problem first.

Macular Degeneration: The Vision Thief

Macular degeneration most commonly occurs in people over the age of 60, which is why it is sometimes called "age-related macular degeneration" or AMD. It occurs in two forms, called "dry" and "wet" macular degeneration. Wet macular degeneration, although a very serious condition, is rare. Almost everyone with macular degeneration starts with the dry form. About 10% will go on to develop the wet form. The characteristic symptoms of AMD are a blind spot in the center of your field of vision, difficulty seeing when moving from an area that is brightly lit to a dimly lit area, and haziness of your overall vision.

Both forms of this disease involve destruction of the delicate blood vessels that supply the macula. The retina changes light and images into nerve signals that are sent to the brain, and the macula is the part of the retina that gives us sharp, detailed vision. If you can imagine looking through a camera viewfinder, and there is a gray smudge on the center of your lens, you get an idea of the visual changes that occur with this disorder. As the damage to the macula continues, the smudge grows larger, obscuring more and more of the normal visual field.

While there is no cure for AMD, there are things you can do to keep your eyes healthy. One of the most important steps is to increase your intake of healthy antioxidants. This protects circulation to the macula and helps forestall progression of macular damage.

Free Radical Damage

While the exact reasons AMD develops are still poorly understood, researchers have found that diets low in antioxidant nutrients increase the risk of AMD. Antioxidants are beneficial molecules that can neutralize unstable free radicals. Unstable free radi-

cals can damage cells and DNA as they seek to stabilize themselves. Antioxidants are able to neutralize free radicals and minimize their damage.

The retina is uniquely sensitive to free radical activity because it is exposed to environmental situations that are known to trigger an increase in free radical formation – continual exposure to light, high levels of oxygen (many free radicals are formed from oxygen), high concentrations of fatty acids (which can become unstable and generate free radicals) and the presence of tissue that can enhance sensitivity to light (photosensitizers).

Astaxanthin

Astaxanthin is a yellow to pink plant pigment (color) in the carotenoid family. Only plants can produce carotenoids, but in the human diet, the major sources of astaxanthin are salmon, trout, and shrimp. These creatures accumulate astaxanthin from krill, which absorbs astaxanthin with the consumption of microalgae (tiny water plants). Astaxanthin from microalgae (*Haematococcus pluvialis* - the richest natural source of this beneficial compound) has been shown to protect the cells of the eye from oxidative stress caused by free radicals. Astaxanthin is able to attach itself to the cell membranes where free radicals attack first, and protect the cell and its fatty acids from free

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Key Words


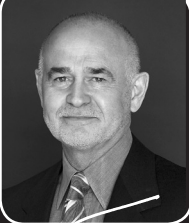
macular degeneration, eye strain, eye health, vision, astaxanthin, black currant, antioxidants, *Haematococcus pluvialis*, anthocyanins, prednisolone, retina, cornea, macula, uveitis

Introduction

They say the eyes are the window to the soul. Our eyes are also our window to the world. Our eyes allow us to read great works of literature and appreciate beautiful art. We can watch the colors of the sunset and make a wish on the Man in the Moon at night. Our eyes allow us to drive a car, hit a softball, and pick our child out of a crowd.

We tend to take our eyes for granted—until we develop a problem. As we get older, we have a harder time seeing in dim light, colors don't appear as bright as they used to, and maybe it is getting more difficult to drive at night. Not to mention the very small print that suddenly appears on every product label and restaurant menu. These age-related changes to our vision can happen gradually and we may miss the warning signs until the problems are more advanced.

Unfortunately, we also become more vulnerable to diseases of the eye, including dry eyes, cataracts, and glaucoma. We are also more vulnerable to eye strain and fatigue. One of the most frequent causes of vision loss as we grow older is macular degeneration. While it cannot be cured, there are ways to slow or stop its progression and help preserve vision. Two excellent nutrients for this purpose are the natural antioxidants, astaxanthin and black

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radical oxidation (destruction). Astaxanthin is *particularly* effective at quenching oxygen-based free radicals found in high numbers in eye tissues. Its antioxidant activity is equal to or greater than vitamin E – the standard marker for antioxidants. It has also been found to reduce inflammation and increase blood flow—both good things for preserving macular health.

Anyone who spends a lot of time staring at a computer screen is probably familiar with the symptoms of eye fatigue: headache, sore eyes, blurry vision, and sensitivity to glare. In a clinical test, after 4 weeks of taking astaxanthin, the participants experienced a 54% reduction in eye fatigue symptoms. In a separate, four week study, astaxanthin reduced tiredness, soreness, dryness and blurry vision. A test of the ability of astaxanthin to reduce eye inflammation found that it has effects equal to that of the steroid drug, prednisolone, without the problematic side effects.

Black Currant

Black currant is a rich natural source of anthocyanins, beneficial antioxidant compounds that also give the berries their rich purple color. Anthocyanins are potent antioxidants which are particularly active in eye tissues. The anthocyanins in black currant help protect delicate retinal tissue from oxidative stress. Like astaxanthin, black currant has been found to be helpful for those who work regularly on computers. In a clinical trial, participants reported reductions in eye fatigue and back pain, and also experienced improvement in adjustments to differing light levels (going from brightly-lit to dark areas, for example).

You Can Make a Difference

Vision is a miraculous gift of nature. The choices we make can have a tremendous impact on the health of our eyes. While we can't always control all the factors that lead to a variety of eye health issues, there are steps we can take to reduce some of the common issues that interfere with healthy vision: free radical damage and inflammation. Astaxanthin and black currant extract provide you with a way to shield your eyes from damaging environmental effects. Whether your problem is as simple as eye strain from spending all day in front of a computer screen, or as complex as the more serious issue of macular degeneration, these supplements can make a real difference in helping to preserve your vision for a lifetime.

Terry recommends a formula with these ingredients. Look for it at your local health food store:

Proprietary Complex 320 mg
Natural Astaxanthin Complex from the microalgae (*Haematococcus pluvialis*) standardized to contain 2% natural astaxanthin and other carotenoids (lutein, canthaxanthin, and β -carotene),
Black Currant (*Ribes nigrum*) Extract standardized to contain >25% Anthocyanins

When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This column is to provide you with information to maintain your health.