

Information from Your Ophthalmologist

AREDS Proves Vitamins and Mineral Supplements Can Slow Progression of Macular Degeneration

What is AREDS?

The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) is a major study sponsored by the National Eye Institute that was conducted at 11 major medical research facilities around the country over the course of 10 years.

In the study, scientists looked at the effects of zinc and antioxidants, and a combination of both, on patients with cataracts, and on those with varying stages and types of age-related macular degeneration (AMD). They also studied patients without evidence of cataract or AMD to determine if zinc and/or antioxidants can prevent the development of these conditions.

What Were the Results?

The study showed a number of important things:

- High levels of antioxidants and zinc can reduce the risk of vision loss from advanced AMD by about 19% in high-risk patients (patients with intermediate AMD or advanced AMD in one eye but not the other).
- Supplements do not provide significant benefit to patients with minimal AMD.
- These nutritional supplements do not prevent the initial development of AMD, nor do they improve vision already lost to AMD.
- Nutritional supplements do not seem to prevent cataracts, or to keep them from getting worse over time.
- 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 hospitalization.

Some patients taking large doses of antioxidants experienced some yellowing of the skin. The long-term effects of taking large doses of these supplements are still unknown.

If you have intermediate or advanced ARMD talk to your physician about taking the AREDS study vitamin formula. He or she can help you determine if the vitamins may be beneficial for you; and what types and doses of vitamin supplements to take. The doses used in the study were:

- **Vitamin C 500 mg**
- **Vitamin E 400 IU**
- **Beta-carotene 15 mg**
- **Zinc 80 mg, as zinc oxide**
- **Copper 2 mg**, as cupric oxide (copper should be taken with zinc, because high-dose zinc is associated with copper deficiency).

It is very important to talk with your Primary Care Physician before taking large-dose supplements, and to follow his or her dosage recommendations carefully. Some supplements may interfere with each other or other medications.

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

Where Can I Get More Information?

Your ophthalmologist is your best source of information about eye care. You can also get trustworthy information from the American Academy of Ophthalmology's web site, www.medem.com/MedLB/bufferpageaao.cfm.

More information on AREDS is available from the National Eye Institute of the National Institutes of Health, www.nei.nih.gov/amd.

Reference: American Academy of Ophthalmology – The Eye M.D. Association