

Macular Degeneration - a visual problem for the elderly

Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness in Australia, it is also a major cause of visual disability even before getting to that point.

Do you remember the time (more than 10 years ago) the newspapers carried reports that fats, especially trans-fats, were to blame for macular degeneration. The finger was pointed at margarine as the culprit. Margarine contained about 5% trans-fats which originated from the hydrogenation process used to produce solid fats from oils such as canola. Shortly after this announcement the margarine industry developed methods to eliminate most trans-fats from their product, however because trans-fats are present in small amounts in many products, including butter, trans-fats are still listed as one of the factors that contribute to AMD.



Dr Donald Carroll, Optometric Physician WA, USA studied the factors that contribute to reducing the risk of AMD and made the following observations:

- 1. Nutrients such as the carotenoids, the colourful substances found in carrots, pumpkins, oranges and the richest source - egg yolk, replenish the macula by building optical pigment density.**
 2. A well functioning intestinal tract is not only necessary for overall health, but is also necessary to absorb carotenoid rich foods.
 3. A well-functioning bile is vital, according to Dr Carroll. Bile is produced in the liver and stored in the gallbladder. The fluids contain bile acids, cholesterol, phospholipids and bilirubin which are critical for digestion and absorption of fats and fat-soluble vitamins such as the carotenoids.
 - 4. Getting the solubilised carotenoids to the macular is the job of HDL particles to carry the carotenoids through the bloodstream to their destination.** To do this it's important to maximise your HDL level.
5. Strategies to raise your HDL levels include:
- Regular exercise
 - Avoid trans-fats by following the Mediterranean Diet
 - Red Wine (a glass a day) or Resveratrol for the non-drinkers
 - Take Fish Oil or Flaxseed Oil

There is strength in combining a multi-pronged approach so consider all of the above.

Geoff