



## Patient Information

# Eggs: A Delicious Way to Protect Your Sight

Eggs are delicious, convenient and easy to prepare — and they're an excellent source of nutrition for people of all ages. And now research shows that eggs have positive effects on eye health.

A single large egg provides an abundance of nutrients:

- 6 grams of protein, which is 13% of the recommended daily amount based on a 2,000-calorie diet
- 5.0 grams of total fat; 1.6 grams of saturated fat. An egg's saturated fat is relatively low compared with its calorie content.
- 125 milligrams of choline and 24 micrograms of folate, which are essential for normal cell function and brain development.
- Vitamins A, D, E, B<sub>12</sub>, B<sub>6</sub>, riboflavin and thiamin, and minerals calcium, potassium, phosphorous, iron and zinc
- 166 micrograms of lutein and zeaxanthin, essential nutrients for eye health

### Eggs and Eye Disease

Eggs are one of the better sources of lutein and zeaxanthin, the substances that naturally give color to richly colored fruits and vegetables and to egg yolks. Lutein and zeaxanthin are also key components of the human eye, and eating foods that contain them is thought to help preserve good eyesight and prevent vision loss. Although dark-colored vegetables such as spinach contain more of these nutrients than eggs do, the lutein and zeaxanthin in eggs is more bioavailable, which means that your body absorbs them more easily from eggs than from spinach or dietary supplements.

The two leading causes of vision loss in the United States are age-related macular degeneration (ARMD) and cataracts. These two conditions occur mostly in people ages 50 and older. Eating foods that provide lutein and zeaxanthin now can lower your risk for ARMD and cataracts later in life.

### Age-Related Macular Degeneration

ARMD is caused by thinning of the macula, an area in the back of the eye that controls how well you see things in the center of your vision and how well you see detail. Risk factors for ARMD include

smoking, high blood pressure, obesity and having light-colored eyes. Sun damage, age and heredity can also contribute to deterioration of the macula.

Currently, there is no treatment for ARMD, but eating foods rich in lutein and zeaxanthin is related to a lower risk for ARMD. Lutein and zeaxanthin protect the macula in two ways. They help build up macular pigment, which protects the macula by filtering out damaging rays from the sun. And they act as antioxidants, slowing any macular damage that does occur.

### Cataracts

A cataract occurs when the healthy clear lens of the eye begins to get cloudy. The lens lies behind the iris and pupil of the eye and focuses light on the retina. A cloudy lens can't properly focus light, causing vision to become progressively blurry.

Sun damage, diabetes, smoking, air pollution and heavy alcohol consumption are among the risk factors for developing cataracts. Visual aids such as stronger glasses or better lighting can help with cataract symptoms for a while, but surgery to replace the lens is the only treatment for advanced cataracts.

The best ways to prevent cataracts are to wear sunglasses and to consume foods that contain antioxidants, especially lutein and zeaxanthin, which can help slow damage.

### Healthy Heart and Healthy Eyes

As people have become more aware of the effect of blood cholesterol on heart health, they've been quick to banish eggs from their diets — too quick.

Recent studies have shown that eating an egg a day has very little effect on the amount of cholesterol in the blood of healthy adults. The small rise in LDL or "bad" cholesterol that can occur in some people from eating eggs is offset by a rise in HDL, the "good" cholesterol. With all this new evidence, it's time to take a new look at the benefits of consuming eggs for eye health. So go ahead and enjoy an eye-healthy omelet today!

For more information, visit the National Eye Institute online: [www.nei.nih.gov](http://www.nei.nih.gov).

### Additional Notes:

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