Vitamins and Your Vision

Richie Eye Clinic – Faribault, MN

The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) is a major, multi-center study sponsored by the National Eye Institute to evaluate the effects of vitamins on the aging eye. The study looked at common problems like cataracts and macular degeneration and found:

1. Antioxidant vitamin combinations can help reduce the rate of vision loss in moderate/severe AMD.
2. Vitamins do not prevent or stop progression of cataracts.
3. No good proof that vitamins prevent AMD.
4. Smokers should avoid beta-carotene (risk of lung cancer).

Antioxidant vitamins used included (total daily dose):

1. Vitamin C 500 mg
2. Vitamin E 400 IU
3. Beta-carotene 15 mg
4. Zinc 80 mg with Copper 2 mg

These can be found in many brands of multiple vitamins, including:

1. Ocuvite
2. I-Caps
3. Ocular Nutrition
4. Various generic equivalent brands

The brand name vitamins can cost $35 per month or more, while the generics may be substantially cheaper. The AREDS study did use high doses, up to four capsules each day, to achieve these results and did not look at other supplements like lutein or bilberry.

Even though we do not have enough data to prove vitamins can prevent AMD or that lutein and bilberry are effective, logic should suggest that they may be. Many doctors do recommend vitamins for people with mild AMD or even those who desire prevention, despite the lack of sound scientific proof of their effectiveness. Ask one of our doctors for more information.