



# Omega-3 Fatty Acids and their Role in Preventing Age-Related Macular Degeneration

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## DESCRIPTION

A degenerative eye condition known as Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) damages the macula, the area of the retina in the center of the eye that provides clear, detailed vision. AMD is the leading cause of vision loss and blindness among people over the age of 50 in developed countries. In fact, it affects more than 200 million people worldwide, and this number is expected to triple by 2050. While there is no cure for AMD, there are several risk factors that have been identified that may contribute to its development, including nutritional factors.

Nutrition is an important modifiable risk factor for AMD. Several studies have investigated the relationship between diet and the development and progression of AMD, with some findings suggesting that certain dietary patterns may increase or decrease the risk of AMD. This article will discuss the nutritional risk factors for AMD and highlight some dietary recommendations that may help reduce the risk of developing this debilitating eye disease.

### Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fatty acids that have anti-inflammatory properties and are important for maintaining healthy vision. Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid are the two most significant omega-3 fatty acids. These fatty acids are found in high concentrations in fish, such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines. Several studies have investigated the relationship between omega-3 fatty acid intake and the risk of AMD.

A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that individuals with the highest intake of EPA had a 38% lower risk of developing advanced AMD compared to those with the lowest intake. Another study published in the journal Ophthalmology found that high dietary intake of omega-3 fatty acids was associated with a lower risk of progression to advanced AMD.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that individuals consume fatty fish at least twice a week to ensure adequate intake of omega-3 fatty acids. For those who do not consume fish, omega-3 supplements may be an alternative option.

### Antioxidants

Compounds called antioxidants guard cells against cellular deterioration brought on by free radicals. Antioxidants are found in many fruits and vegetables and include vitamins A, C, and E, and the minerals zinc and selenium.

The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) found that a combination of antioxidants and zinc significantly reduced the risk of developing advanced AMD in individuals with intermediate or advanced AMD in one or both eyes. Second AREDS study further investigated the role of antioxidants in AMD and found that adding lutein and zeaxanthin to the original AREDS formula did not provide additional benefits.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that individuals consume a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, particularly those high in vitamins A, C, and E, and the minerals zinc and selenium. Examples include carrots, sweet potatoes, leafy greens, citrus fruits, berries, nuts, and seeds.

### High glycemic index foods

Foods with a high Glycemic Index (GI) are rapidly absorbed and cause a spike in blood sugar levels, while foods with a low GI are absorbed more slowly and cause a gradual rise in blood sugar levels. Several studies have investigated the relationship between dietary GI and the risk of AMD.

A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that individuals with the highest dietary GI had a 49% higher risk of developing early AMD compared to those with the lowest dietary GI. Another study published in the Journal of Nutrition found that a diet with a high GI was associated with a higher risk of progression to advanced AMD.

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**Received:** 22-Feb-2023, Manuscript No. JEDD-23- 20569; **Editor assigned:** 24-Feb-2023, Pre QC No. JEDD-23- 20569 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 10-Mar-2023, QC No JEDD-23- 20569; **Revised:** 17-Mar-2023, Manuscript No. JEDD-23- 20569 (R); **Published:** 27-Mar-2023, DOI: 10.35248/2684-1622.23.8.196

**Citation:** Patel C (2023) Omega-3 Fatty Acids and their Role in Preventing Age-Related Macular Degeneration. J Eye Dis Disord. 8:196.

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