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Open Your Eyes to Healthy Eating Habits

Millions of Americans Can Protect Against Eye Diseases by Eating Healthier

ST. LOUIS, MO, Feb. 26, 2009 — In honor of March's Save Your Vision Month, the American Optometric Association (AOA) reminds Americans that caring for eyes includes paying attention to nutrition.

Approximately 43 million Americans suffer from age-related macular degeneration (AMD) or cataracts, the two leading causes of vision loss and blindness. Based on research from multiple studies, there is a strong correlation between good nutrition and the prevention of these age-related eye diseases. By eating foods rich in six nutrients — antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin, essential fatty acids, vitamins C and E and the mineral zinc — you can help protect your eye sight and vision.

Research shows that 30 million (or one out of four) Americans age 40 and older suffer from some level of vision loss. According to the AOA's 2008 American Eye-Q® survey, which assesses public knowledge and understanding of a wide range of issues related to eye and visual health, only 29 percent of Americans are coping with vision loss or other eye problems by increasing nutrients for healthy eyes.

"Basic and clinical research has shown that nutrients in eye-healthy foods can slow vision loss," said Dr. Stuart Richer, optometrist and AOA's Vision and Nutrition Expert. "Indeed, in some cases, these foods can even improve vision, while providing additional health benefits to the patient."

Healthy Fruits and Vegetables

Together, the AOA and registered dietician Elizabeth Somer recommend eating a diet with a variety of foods loaded with key nutrients for maintaining and improving eye health, such as lutein (LOO-teen) and zeaxanthin.

The American Eye-Q® survey showed that nearly half of all Americans (48 percent) still believe carrots are the best food for eye health. While carrots do contain nutritional value by supplying the provitamin A beta-carotene which is essential for night vision, spinach and other dark, leafy greens prove to be the healthiest foods for eyes because they naturally contain large amounts of lutein and zeaxanthin.

The AOA, along with nutritional ingredient manufacturers Kemin and DSM, recommend the following foods which contain the key nutrients for eye health:

- **Lutein and zeaxanthin:** Colorful fruits and vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, kale, corn, green beans, peas, oranges and tangerines
- **Essential fatty acids:** Fatty fish like tuna, salmon, or herring, whole grain foods, chicken and eggs
- **Vitamin C:** Fruits and vegetables, including oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, papaya, green peppers and tomatoes
- **Vitamin E:** Vegetable oils, such as safflower or corn oil, almonds, pecans, sweet potatoes, and sunflower seeds

- **Zinc:** Extra-lean red meat, poultry, liver, shellfish, milk, baked beans, and whole grains

“Nutrition is a component of health for the entire body, including the eyes,” said Somer, a registered dietician and nutrition research expert. “I suggest incorporating nutritious ingredients into daily menus. There are some great, quick and simple recipes that promote healthy eye sight and vision.”

One example of a quick and easy eye-healthy recipe includes:

Whole-Wheat Penne with Spinach and Gorgonzola

Ingredients:

10 oz. uncooked whole-wheat penne pasta
Olive oil cooking spray
1 1/2 cup yellow onion, diced (~1 medium onion)
3 large garlic cloves, minced
1/2 cup chicken broth
3 Roma tomatoes, chopped (~2 cups)
1 (6-ounce) bag fresh baby spinach
1/3 cup fresh basil, chopped or 1 teaspoon dried basil
salt and pepper to taste
2/3 cup crumbled gorgonzola cheese [or substitute 1/2 cup low-fat freshly-grated parmesan cheese]
1/3 cup pine nuts (optional)

Directions:

- Cook pasta according to package directions, without salting water.
- While pasta is cooking, spray a large, non-stick frying pan with cooking spray. Heat over medium-high heat. Add onions, then stir and cook until slightly transparent, approximately 5 minutes. Add garlic, stir and cook for another minute. Add broth and let simmer for 3 minutes. Add tomatoes, toss, and simmer for 2 minutes. Add spinach and basil, cook and stir for approximately 2 minutes, or until leaves wilt. Remove from heat and salt/pepper to taste.
- Drain pasta and add to spinach mixture. Thoroughly toss. Serve on a platter and top with gorgonzola (or parmesan) cheese and pine nuts. Makes 6 servings.

Nutritional Information (per serving): 300 Calories; 25% fat (8.3 g total, 2.8 g saturated), 57% carbohydrate (43 g), 18% protein (13.5 g), 8 mg cholesterol, 8.6 g fiber, 27 mg vitamin C, 1.33 mg vitamin E, 20.4 mg lutein/zeaxanthin, 271 mg sodium.

Did You Know?

- Eating spinach can reduce your risk of getting certain eye diseases like AMD because it contains a large amount of lutein, an important eye nutrient. In order to maintain healthy eyes, add 10 mg of lutein to your diet each day or eat one cup of cooked spinach four times a week.
- More than 50 percent of Americans do not take in the recommended dosage of Vitamin C per day. Vitamin C has been linked, in approved amounts, to minimize or reduce the risk of cataracts and AMD.

- One cup (8 fl oz) of orange juice per day contains 81.6 mg/serving of Vitamin C, more than enough to help offset some eye diseases.

To find an optometrist in your area, or for additional information on nutrition and eye-healthy recipes as well as other issues concerning eye health, please visit www.aoa.org.

About the survey:

The third annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From May 17-19, 2008, using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,001 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level.)

About the American Optometric Association (AOA):

The American Optometric Association represents approximately 36,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians. Optometrists serve patients in nearly 6,500 communities across the country, and in 3,500 of those communities are the only eye doctors. Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.

American Optometric Association doctors of optometry are highly qualified, trained doctors on the frontline of eye and vision care who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the eye. In addition to providing eye and vision care, optometrists play a major role in a patient's overall health and well-being by detecting systemic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

Prior to optometry school, optometrists typically complete four years of undergraduate study, culminating in a bachelor's degree. Required undergraduate coursework for pre-optometry students is extensive and covers a wide variety of advanced health, science and mathematics. Optometry school consists of four years of post-graduate, doctoral study concentrating on both the eye and systemic health. In addition to their formal training, doctors of optometry must undergo annual continuing education to stay current on the latest standards of care. For more information, visit www.aoa.org.

About Kemin – Inspired Molecular Solutions™

Founded in 1961, Kemin Industries, Inc. (www.kemin.com) provides health and nutritional solutions to the agrifoods, food ingredients, pet food and human health and pharmaceutical industries. Kemin operates in more than 60 countries with manufacturing facilities in Belgium, Brazil, China, India, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States. For more information about Kemin, visit www.kemin.com.

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