Eye Diseases Linked to Increased Mortality Risk

Individuals with visual impairment from eye diseases such as cataracts or age-related macular degeneration appear to have a higher likelihood of premature death compared with similar individuals without these conditions, Australian researchers reported.*

Researchers followed over 3,600 participants for an average of 11 years. Participants with any visual impairment, those with cataracts, and those with age-related macular degeneration were all more likely to die during the study period than those without these conditions.

It is not clear whether the link between visual impairment and death is a direct one, or if another factor is involved. "The implications of these findings also remain uncertain: whether such an association indicates that visual impairment, age-related eye disease, or both are markers of aging and frailty or whether these ocular conditions accelerate aging, thus leading to relatively earlier death in older persons," the researchers wrote.

—Marc Ellman, MD  

Colorful Anthocyanins Fight Colon Cancer

Anthocyanins—compounds that give red, violet, and blue plants their color—offer powerful colon cancer-fighting ability, according to recent research.*

Various extracts containing anthocyanins were tested on cultured human colon cancer cells. Using extracts from grapes, radishes, purple corn, chokeberries, bilberries, purple carrots, elderberries, and other plants, scientists determined the amount needed from each to decrease the growth of the cancer cells by half. Purple corn extract was the most potent, followed by chokeberry and bilberry. Anthocyanins from radish and black carrots slowed the growth of cancer cells anywhere from 50% to 80%; however, anthocyanins from purple corn and chokeberries completely stopped the cancer growth, as well as killing 20% of the cancerous cells. In rats, anthocyanins from bilberries and chokeberries reduced the signs of colon tumors by 70% and 60%, respectively.

"All fruits and vegetables that are rich in anthocyanins have compounds that can slow down the growth of colon cancer cells," the authors concluded.

—Dayna Dye  

Calcium, Vitamin D Protect Against Breast Cancer

Women with a higher intake of calcium enjoy a lower risk of developing breast cancer, according to two recent epidemiological studies involving large groups of women.1,2 A protective effect is also correlated with vitamin D intake.1

One study, conducted in France, considered calcium obtained from dairy products. Results showed that women with the highest intake of dairy calcium enjoyed a 45% reduction in breast cancer risk. The risk reduction reached 65% for premenopausal women. "Our data support the hypothesis that dairy products, through calcium content or a correlated component, might have a negative association with the risk of breast cancer, particularly among premenopausal women," wrote the researchers.2

Similarly, an American study found that premenopausal women with the highest intakes of calcium and vitamin D reduced their risk of developing breast cancer by nearly 40%.1

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