Keep your eye on lutein

Cataracts are a leading cause of blindness in this country, and every year more than 244,000 Canadians undergo cataract surgery. Spanish researchers have found a more natural, less invasive solution for this age-related condition: lutein, a phytonutrient found in spinach and other leafy greens.

In a 2002 study, volunteers with cataracts were given supplements containing either 15 mg of lutein, 100 mg of vitamin E, or placebo capsules. When they were retested after two years, vision had improved in the group taking lutein, while it held its own in those taking vitamin E and deteriorated in the placebo group.

Earlier studies demonstrated that lutein also protects against macular degeneration, another common cause of blindness. If you are concerned about your vision—and if you are over age 50, you should be—I suggest that you add lutein and other vision-protecting nutrients such as bilberry and zeaxanthin to your supplement regimen.


Centre photo by Edmond Fong—spinach salad.

Folic acid and depression

Folate, or folic acid, is found in green leafy vegetables such as spinach and kale. It is concentrated in the body’s spinal fluids, and is necessary for brain and nervous system function. Is it possible, then, that folate affects depression?

Scientists at the University of Finland set out to answer this question, having recently performed the first study linking dietary folate levels to depression. Previously, only blood folate levels had been studied. More than 2,600 men, aged 42 to 60, took part in the study. Symptoms of depression were assessed using the 18-item Human Laboratory Depression Scale. Those who scored five or higher at baseline were considered to have elevated depressive symptoms. Participants were then divided into three groups according to folate intake.

The study took into account socioeconomic status, marital status, body mass index, education, and alcohol and cigarette consumption. Those with the lowest intake had a higher risk of becoming depressed than those in the group with the highest intake.

Source: Journal of the American Society for Nutritional Sciences.

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