National Eye Institute Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS)

The findings of a major clinical trial sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI) have revealed that taking supplements with high levels of antioxidants and zinc can significantly reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and its associated vision loss. The large-scale national study, which followed approximately 4,700 patients over the course of five years, showed that individuals with intermediate-stage AMD reduced their risk of progressing to the advanced stage of the disease by 25 percent when they took high doses of nutrients — such as vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene, and zinc — at prescribed levels. Patients with very early or no macular degenerative changes did not benefit from the supplements.

Dietary Supplements

Supplements identified in the NEI study:

- Vitamin C 500 mg
- Vitamin E 400 IU
- Beta-carotene 15 mg
- Zinc 80 mg
- Copper 2 mg

Risks

Individuals interested in taking a combination of vitamins and nutrients to slow the progression of AMD should consult with their physician and ophthalmologist. Beta-carotene can increase the risk of lung cancers and should not be taken by smokers. Zinc can lead to copper deficiency anemia in some patients. Moreover, high levels of zinc are associated with increased genitourinary complications (7.5% vs. 4.9%).

Please ask your eye care professional about other over-the-counter supplements containing the AREDS formula, including:

- I-Caps AREDS formula
- Bausch & Lomb Preservision

Other Dietary Compounds May Protect Against AMD

Studies are underway to investigate benefits of the following supplements:

- Omega-3 fatty acids: found in over-the-counter supplements and in high levels in fish — particularly herring, sardines, mackerel, salmon, and halibut.
- Lutein/Zeaxanthin: found in high levels in green vegetables — such as kale, spinach, collard greens, broccoli, and brussels sprouts. These vegetables should be consumed with caution by patients on warfarin.

For more information

Visit the National Eye Institute website:
www.nei.nih.gov/amd