

Study: Eating Fish Can Reduce Risk for Macular Degeneration

A new study provides one more reason to include healthy servings of fish in one's diet. In the study, women who consumed a diet rich in fish and omega-3 fatty acids significantly reduced their risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of vision loss. The research was published in the *Archives of Ophthalmology* in March.

The study, which followed almost 40,000 women over a 10-year period, found that participants who reported eating one or more servings of fish per week were 42 percent less likely to develop macular degeneration than those who ate less than one serving each month. Eating canned tuna and dark-meat fish such as mackerel, salmon, sardines, bluefish and swordfish appeared to have the most benefit.

"It's an interesting study," said Dr. Mark Fleckner, an ophthalmologist with offices in Fresh Meadows and Garden City. "Including the right kinds of fish in one's diet seems to be a relatively easy way to reduce the risk of a potentially devastating disease," said Fleckner, who specializes in treating macular degeneration and other diseases of the retina. He did not participate in the research.

Macular degeneration is a leading cause of visual impairment and blindness in older Americans. It usually develops gradually and destroys sharp, central vision needed to see objects

clearly and perform common tasks such as reading and driving.

About nine million U.S. adults ages 40 and older show signs of age-related macular degeneration. The most serious wet form of the disease can be treated with photodynamic therapy or injections of a medication into the eye. Although none of these treatments is a cure, the goal is to stop progression of the disease.

"It's important that all adults over 40 get their eyes checked at least every two years, or more often if they have a pre-existing condition or a family history of eye disease," said Fleckner, who specializes in macular degeneration and other diseases affecting the retina. "As with other eye diseases, the earlier macular degeneration is diagnosed, the better the chance of a good result from treatment."

In addition to eating fish, other healthy habits may help prevent macular degeneration. Previous studies have shown that certain vitamins and zinc can reduce risk and slow the progression of the disease.

Fleckner says anyone wishing to preserve their vision would also do well to eat lots of green, leafy vegetables. Avoiding smoking, staying out of the sun or wearing sunglasses with UV protection, and controlling high blood pressure are also good measures to reduce eye disease risk, according to Fleckner.