

# The Telegraph

## Higher vitamin D dose could help elderly protect eyesight

Increasing Vitamin D intake could significantly lower the risk of developing the leading cause of blindness, research suggests.



One way older people can help protect their eyesight is by ensuring they take enough vitamin D Photo: ALAMY

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A study of older women found that those who had the highest levels of the vitamin, found in oily fish and eggs as well as dietary supplement pills, were nearly 60 per cent less likely to contract age-related macular degeneration.

Scientists believe it has anti-inflammatory properties that can help prevent the incurable condition by stopping the eyes being damaged.

Their research indicates that taking in more Vitamin D through food or tablets, rather than sunlight, can help protect against developing AMD.

However the researchers recommend that older people talk to their doctors first to see if they need to take supplements. Some studies have warned against taking large amounts of the vitamin, which also helps reduce cancer risk, because in high doses it is thought to weaken bones.

"In conclusion, Vitamin D status may significantly affect a woman's odds of developing early AMD," the study said.

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AMD, which is thought to have left 230,000 people in Britain partially blind, is the leading cause of blindness worldwide.

There is no cure for the condition, caused by progressive damage to the centre of the retina at the back of the eye, and treatment to reduce the symptoms is limited and costly.

"Therefore it is important to identify modifiable risk factors that may affect disease occurrence or prevent progression to advanced stages," says the paper published in the journal Archives of Ophthalmology.

It suggests that one way older people can help protect their eyesight is by ensuring they take enough Vitamin D.

Researchers studied 1,313 post-menopausal American women aged between 50 and 79.

They tested the levels of a substance called serum 25(OH)D in their blood, which reflects Vitamin D intake, and also asked them about their diet and how much time they spent outdoors.

Several years later examined the women to see how many were losing their sight.

They found that among those aged under 75 who had the highest intakes of Vitamin D were far less likely to develop early AMD, although this did not hold for older women.

Those who took an average of 720 International Units (18 micrograms) a day were 59 per cent less likely to develop the condition than those who took less than 120 IU (3 micrograms).

This highest intake level is less than the 1,000 IU (25 micrograms) in a standard dietary supplement pill but more than the recommended daily allowance of 400 IU (10 micrograms) for adults and 600 IU (15 micrograms) for pensioners.

The study claimed that those who had the highest levels of Vitamin D secured it through foods such as milk, fish and fortified margarine, rather than sunlight.

The scientists suggest that Vitamin D, which has anti-inflammatory properties, may stop the "destructive inflammation" in parts of the retina that lead to AMD.

However they caution against all older people starting to take Vitamin D pills immediately.

Lead researcher Amy Millen, from the University at Buffalo, New York, said: "I would tell women to discuss with their physicians whether or not they should be taking supplements based on their current vitamin D status."

The Department of Health's website states: "Taking high doses of vitamin D for long periods of time could weaken your bones.

"Most people should be able to get the vitamin D they need by eating a varied and balanced diet and by getting some sun. If you take vitamin D supplements, do not take too much.

"Taking 25 micrograms (1,000 IU) or less a day of vitamin D supplements is unlikely to cause any harm."