

# Healthy diet associated with lower risk of cataracts in women

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Women who eat foods rich in a variety of vitamins and minerals may have a lower risk of developing the most common type of cataract that occurs in the United States, according to a report in the June issue of *Archives of Ophthalmology*.

Cataracts, which increase in prevalence with age, are the most important cause of blindness in the world; in the United States, [cataract](#) is the most prevalent cause of [visual impairment](#) due to eye disease according to background in the article. "There are limited studies published to date in which nutritional risk factors are evaluated concurrently with a comprehensive set of other lifestyle, ocular health and physical risk factors."

Julie A. Mares, Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, Madison, and colleagues studied 1,808 women (age 55 to 86) who participated in the Carotenoids in Age-Related Eye Disease study, residing in Iowa, Wisconsin and Oregon. The estimates of daily food and nutrition intake were made from previous responses to a semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire used at the time as part of the Women's Health Initiative study. Additionally, "adherence to the 1990 dietary guidelines for Americans and the 1992 food guide pyramid, reflecting dietary recommendations at the time women entered the Women's Health Initiative, was estimated by the 1995 Healthy Eating Index scores adapted to this questionnaire." Foods that contributed to higher diet scores were intakes at or above recommended levels for vegetables, fruits, grains, milk, meat (or beans, fish or eggs) and below

recommended levels for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.

According to the study, nuclear cataract was common in the sample with 29 percent (454 women) reporting the [eye disease](#) with a lens in at least one eye. Additionally, 282 women (16 percent) had reported cataract extractions in either eye. Overall, 736 women (41 percent) had either nuclear cataracts evident from lens photographs or reported having a cataract extracted. "Results from this study indicate that healthy diets, which reflect adherence to the U.S. dietary guidelines at the time of entry in the Women's Health Initiative study, are more strongly related to the lower occurrence of nuclear cataracts than any other modifiable risk factor or protective factor studied in this sample of women," the study states.

"In conclusion, this study adds to the body of literature suggesting that healthy diets are associated with lower risk for cataract," the authors write. "Lifestyle improvements that include healthy diets, smoking cessation, and avoiding obesity may substantively lower the need for and economic burden of cataract surgery in aging American [women](#)."

**More information:** Arch Ophthalmol. 2010;128[6]:738-749.

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