

Cataracts: Complementary/Alternative Medicine

QUICK REVIEW

- In cataract formation, the normal protective mechanisms are unable to prevent free-radical damage.

- Individuals with higher dietary intakes of antioxidants have a much lower risk for developing cataracts.

Several clinical studies have demonstrated that vitamin C supplementation can halt cataract progression and, in some cases, significantly improve vision.

- Bilberry extract plus vitamin E stopped progression of cataract formation in forty-eight of fifty patients.

- An ancient Chinese formula, *Hachimijiogan*, has been shown to increase the antioxidant level of the lens of the eye.

Nutritional Supplements

- Vitamin C: 1 g three times per day • Vitamin E: 400-800 IU per day

- Selenium: 400 mcg per day

- Beta-carotene: 200,000 IU per day

- Quercetin: 500 mg three times per day • L-cysteine: 400 mg per day

- L-glutamine: 200 mg per day • L-glycine: 200 mg per day

Botanical Medicines

- Bilberry extract (25% anthocyanidin content): 40 to 80 mg three times per day

- *Hachimijiogan* formula: 150 mg three times per day

TREATMENT SUMMARY

Progression of cataract formation can be stopped, and early cataracts can be reversed. However, significant reversal of well-developed cataracts does not appear possible at this time. In cases of marked vision impairment, cataract removal and lens implant may be the only alternative. As with most diseases, prevention or treatment at an early stage is most effective.

Since free-radical damage appears to be the primary factor in the induction of senile cataracts, avoidance of oxidizing agents and promotion of free radical scavenging are critically important to successful treatment. The individual with cataracts should: avoid direct sunlight and bright light in general; wear sunglasses with UV protection when outdoors; and greatly increase intake of antioxidant nutrients.

Diet

Avoid fried foods, rancid foods, and other sources of free radicals. Increase consumption of legumes (high in sulfur containing amino acids), yellow-orange vegetables (high in carotenes), and fresh fruits and vegetables (high in vitamins E and C).