

Healthy You

FAST FACTS FOR YOUR HEALTH

Vitamins for Vision: Will Pills Deliver Eye-popping Benefits?

There's a vitamin or supplement for just about everything. What they generally lack is solid evidence to support their claims. However, research shows that some nutrients benefit people with certain eye conditions. Can the right mix of vitamins boost your eye health and prevent potential serious problems?

Special note: *Do not start a vitamin or supplement regimen without talking to your doctor. Even though these substances are commonly available without a prescription, they can pose problems (such as interacting with your other medication). Always get your doctor's approval first.*

Vitamins for Preventive Vision Care: Should You Stock Up?

In most cases, your optometrist won't recommend a supplement regimen if you have healthy eyes. But if you already take a daily multivitamin, you're likely getting plenty of nutrients for your eyes. The nutrients below are commonly found in multivitamins and may help support your eye health:

- Vitamin C
- Vitamin E
- Vitamin A (or beta-carotene)
- Zinc
- Zeaxanthin
- Selenium
- Lutein
- Calcium
- Thiamin
- Folic acid
- Omega-3 essential fatty acids

Can Vision Supplements Curb Age-Related Macular Degeneration Risk?

One of the most well-known studies that examined the effect of nutrients and eye health is the **Age-Related Eye Disease Study**, funded by the National Eye Institute. The study found that people who took high doses of nutrients such as vitamin C, vitamin E and zinc had a 25 percent reduced risk of developing advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss.

If you are at high risk for advanced AMD, talk to your eye doctor about the potential risks and benefits of a supplement regimen to support your eye health.

If you're unsure whether you have AMD, see your optometrist. He or she can perform tests that will confirm whether you have this condition.

Vitamins for Vision: The Big Takeaway

Remember that supplements are just that—*supplements*. While they may support your health, they cannot replace a healthy and balanced diet. You could stock up on every vitamin and supplement that might support eye health, but the best thing you can do for your eyes is to see an optometrist every one to two years. A comprehensive exam will show if you are at risk for vision loss or other eye problems. Your eye doctor will work with you to create a customized prevention or treatment plan, which may include vitamins and supplements to support your eye health.

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Charcoal for Teeth-whitening: Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin Weighs In

It sounds like a total contradiction: Can brushing your teeth with black charcoal powder give you a whiter smile?

YouTube videos of people scrubbing their teeth with the jet-black powder have many wondering whether the results defy the logic. Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa, offers his expert opinion on whether this sooty substance is the solution for a faded smile.

The Science Behind the Fad

The first thing you need to know about charcoal for teeth whitening is that not all charcoal is the same. People who claim charcoal whitens their teeth use *activated charcoal*, which is different than the charcoal used for grilling food.

Activated charcoal is extremely porous, which is key to its potential benefits. Those pores absorb external substances like a sponge.

In theory, here's how it works: The pores in activated charcoal absorb and remove stains from teeth. Using activated charcoal tablets or powder, mix it with water, apply it to your teeth with a toothbrush and rinse after a few minutes.

The Verdict: Does Charcoal Whiten Teeth?

The short answer: probably not. Consumer reviews are mixed, and the dental community recommends using other methods.

“There is no credible evidence that shows charcoal dental products safely or effectively whiten teeth,” said Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin, Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa.



Charcoal for Teeth Whitening: 3 Risks to Know

While charcoal's whitening potential is fuzzy, there are clear risks to your teeth.

1. Charcoal's texture is grainy, so rubbing it against your teeth can wear down your tooth enamel and damage your gums.
2. Charcoal may increase tooth sensitivity.
3. If you use charcoal to replace your regular tooth-brushing routine, you also lose the cavity-protecting fluoride in toothpaste. Always use fluoride toothpaste twice daily on your teeth.

Given these risks, Dr. Chaffin said he recommends other whitening solutions over charcoal.

“When choosing an over-the-counter teeth whitener, look for products that have the ADA (American Dental Association) seal of acceptance,” Dr. Chaffin said. “Those products are safe when used as directed. However, whiteners can cause tooth sensitivity if you leave them on for too long.”

Also, Dr. Chaffin said a common question around tooth whitening is whether the whiteners are actually working. He offered a simple tip to find out.

“Start by whitening just the top or the bottom teeth first, and then compare to see if there is a difference,” he said.

As always, your dentist is your best source of whitening information. He or she can customize a plan for you to keep your smile white, bright—and with no charcoal in sight.