

Antioxidant supplements for the prevention of age-related macular degeneration

A number of antioxidant supplements marketed for eye health are available. They are classed as food supplements, and are not licensed as medicines. This briefing focuses on their use for the prevention of age-related macular degeneration (AMD). It provides the rationale for discontinuing supply of such products on NHS FP10 prescriptions.

Recommendations

- As the balance of benefits and risks of taking antioxidant supplements for AMD is not currently clear, they are not recommended for prescribing.
- Discontinue prescribing antioxidant vitamins for the prevention of AMD on FP10 and do not initiate new prescriptions.
- Inform patients and provide them with information about the change.
- Self-management support and advice for AMD should include a discussion about smoking cessation (where relevant), diet, and sources of practical and emotional support.¹
- People that wish to purchase antioxidants marketed for eye health should discuss them with their GP before taking them.
- People who smoke, former-smokers, and those who have been exposed to asbestos should not take supplements containing beta-carotene. Beta-carotene supplementation has been associated with an increased risk of lung cancer in some groups.²⁻⁴

Supporting evidence

Evidence supporting antioxidant supplements in slowing AMD progression comes primarily from two studies, AREDS and AREDS2.^{4,5} Whilst some of the data suggests a modest benefit, NICE do not consider the evidence to be definitive because of reservations about these studies.* There is also concern that the high doses of vitamins and minerals contained in these supplements may cause harm in some people. Further study is needed before such supplements can be recommended for prescribing.¹

For further information about potential adverse effects and advice for those that want to purchase antioxidant supplements for eye health, see the full PrescQIPP bulletin. This is available on the link below, along with other resources to support this work.

*At the time of publication of this briefing only the draft version of the NICE clinical guideline for AMD was available. Draft NICE guidance is subject to stakeholder consultation and the final version of the guidance may differ.

Costs and savings

Various products are available.

Several of the more commonly prescribed options cost between £9 - £12 for 30 days treatment.⁶ Even if the cost per person is perceived to be small, use across the large potential population could have a significant resource impact.¹

Discontinuing prescribing of antioxidant vitamins marketed for eye health could release **savings of over £1.6 million annually across England and Wales. This equates to savings of £2,874 per 100,000 patients.**



Bulletin



Patient letter

Available here: <https://www.prescqipp.info/b206-antioxidant-vitamins-for-amd/category/417-antioxidant-vitamins-for-amd>



Data pack

Available here: https://basecamp.com/2490352/projects/13770747/todos/300139413#comment_579723273

References

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