

## Position statement on the prescribing of ocular supplements for the prevention of age related macular degeneration

**SW London CCGs\* do not support the routine prescribing of lutein and antioxidant vitamins for the prevention of age related macular degeneration (AMD), in line with NHS England's national guidance on medicines which should no longer be routinely prescribed**

Examples of multivitamin and mineral preparations marketed for eye health or for prevention of AMD include Icaps<sup>®</sup>, Viteyes Original<sup>®</sup>, Viteyes Original Formula Plus Lutein<sup>®</sup>, Occuvite Complete capsules<sup>®</sup>, Preservision Original<sup>®</sup> and Preservision Lutein capsules<sup>®</sup>. Many other food supplement preparations for eye health are available.<sup>1</sup>

### Rationale

- The evidence for potential benefit of using antioxidant vitamins for the prevention of AMD shows that taking a combination of very high doses of antioxidants and zinc (along with 2mg copper to prevent anaemia) had a modest (20 - 25 %) reduction in the progression to advanced AMD compared to placebo, and the addition of lutein, zeaxanthin and omega-3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids had a limited effect on reducing the risk of progression to advanced AMD.<sup>1,2</sup>
- A Cochrane review highlighted that the AREDS 1 & 2 studies were conducted in well-nourished American populations, and therefore the evidence for nutrient supplementation in prevention of progression from early to late AMD cannot be extrapolated to the general population. In addition, the review stated that harmful effects associated with long-term vitamin supplementation, particularly in smokers and people with vascular disease, cannot be ruled out.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Guidance from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists suggests that, following the results of AREDS, there may be a place for supplementation in patients with advanced AMD in the fellow eye.<sup>2</sup> Locally, ophthalmologists should not be prescribing these vitamin supplements, as they are not available on any local formularies, but they may recommend that certain patients buy the vitamins over the counter (OTC).
- There are a number of different supplements available in the UK which claim to support good ocular health. Many are unlicensed and have therefore not undergone regulatory assessment. Their safety following long-term exposure cannot be guaranteed.

### References

1. PrescQIPP Bulletin 86 Lutein and Antioxidant Vitamins for Prevention of Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) (DROP-List), December 2014. <https://www.prescqipp.info/resources/send/133-lutein-and-antioxidant-vitamins/1706-bulletin-86-lutein-and-antioxidant-vitamins-drop-list> Accessed August 2016
2. The Royal College of Ophthalmologists Age-Related Macular Degeneration: Guidelines for Management September 2013. <https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2013-SCI-318-RCOphth-AMD-Guidelines-Sept-2013-FINAL-2.pdf> Accessed August 2016.

### Further information available from:

- NHS England. Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/items-which-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/>. Updated November 2017.

\*SWL CCGs (NHS Croydon CCG, NHS Kingston CCG, NHS Merton CCG, NHS Richmond CCG and NHS Sutton CCG) position statement on prescribing of ocular supplements for the prevention of age related macular degeneration

## Guidance for clinicians

### Recommendations:

- Guidance from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists suggests that, following the results of AREDS, there may be a place for supplementation in patients with advanced AMD in the fellow eye.<sup>2</sup> Locally, ophthalmologists should not be prescribing these vitamin supplements as they are not available on any local formularies, but they may recommend that certain patients buy the vitamins OTC.
- Patients currently prescribed ocular supplements should have their prescription stopped and informed that they will no longer receive the supplements on the NHS.
- Lutein and antioxidant vitamins are not suitable for some groups of patients e.g. beta carotene has been found to increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers AND ex-smokers, so history should be checked before advising patients to buy OTC.
- Patients wishing to continue taking supplements should be advised to purchase them OTC. The majority of products are not licensed medicines (i.e. have not undergone regulatory assessment) and are classed as food supplements.
- Patients should be advised on how to safely obtain vitamins by dietary means. A patient information leaflet (PIL) is available – see webpage below.  
<https://www.macularsociety.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Accessible%20Nutrition%20JAN17.pdf>

## Guidance for patients, carers and guardians

- Current evidence is limited on the potential benefits of lutein and antioxidant vitamins for age related macular degeneration.
- Your ophthalmologist will advise you to buy a supplement if they think you may benefit.
- There are a number of different supplements available in the UK, which claim to support good ocular health. Many are unlicensed and have therefore, not undergone regulatory assessment. Their safety following long-term exposure cannot be guaranteed.
- Lutein and antioxidant vitamins are not suitable for some groups of patients e.g. beta carotene has been found to increase the risk of lung cancer in smokers AND ex-smokers, so if this applies to you, make sure you discuss this with your pharmacist.
- For further information on nutrition and eye health in AMD see  
<https://www.macularsociety.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Accessible%20Nutrition%20JAN17.pdf>

A patient information leaflet is also available: <https://www.prescqipp.info/items-which-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-patient-leaflets>

**The NHS belongs to YOU, use it responsibly**