Lutein and Antioxidant supplements – Information for Patients

NHS guidance states that some treatments should not routinely be prescribed. This is because the treatments are:

- Not as safe as other treatments OR
- Not as good (effective) as other treatments OR
- More expensive than other treatments that do the same thing.

This includes lutein and antioxidant supplements.

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

What are lutein and antioxidant supplements?

Lutein and antioxidant supplements contain vitamins A, C and E, minerals such as zinc and substances called carotenoids, such as lutein and zeaxanthin. There are several different products on the market.

They are said to help prevent an eye condition called Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), or to stop AMD getting worse in people who already have it.

Why will lutein and antioxidant supplements not be prescribed anymore?

The idea of using antioxidant vitamins to prevent AMD came from an American study, which suggested that they would benefit patients. However, the possible benefits seen in this study were not repeated in later studies as vitamins did not stop AMD from getting worse. There is not enough evidence that they work.

There is also some concern that the high doses of vitamins and minerals in these supplements may cause harm in some people.

What can I do if I still want to take lutein and antioxidant supplements?

Supplements can be bought over-the-counter from a pharmacy (chemist) or health food shop. They are not suitable for everyone, so ask for advice from a pharmacist.

Are there any other things I can do to reduce my risk of AMD?

Eating a healthy diet rich in oily fish, leafy green vegetables and fresh fruit is recommended. Protect your eyes from the sun and don't smoke.

Have regular eye check-ups.

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, optometrist, GP practice team or the person who prescribed the medication to you
- You can get help and information from the Macular Society www.macularsociety.org/

- The Patients Association can also offer support and advice: www.patients-association.org.uk/ or call 0800 345 7115
- Healthwatch: www.healthwatch.co.uk

Find out more about the medicines that are being stopped or reduced: https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/items-which-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-policy-guidance/