

## What can I do to help myself?

If you smoke, try to stop - there are many health benefits to stopping. Smoking is a risk factor for many illnesses including ARMD. Ask your GP, pharmacist or your local NHS Stop Smoking Service for help, support and medicines to assist you to quit. If you live in Newcastle or North Tyneside tel: **0300 123 9290**. If you live in Northumberland tel: **01670 813 135**.

Eat a healthy balanced diet to try to make sure you get plenty of the types of vitamins that may help ARMD. Eating more fruit and vegetables will also increase the amount of antioxidant vitamin and minerals you take in.

Consider regular sight tests as you get older. You should visit an optician every two years, even if there is no change in your vision. An eye test can often pick up the first signs of an eye condition before you notice any change in your vision.

## Key points

- Antioxidant vitamin and mineral supplements for aged related macular degeneration will no longer be prescribed by your GP
- There is no good clinical evidence to show that they work as a preventative treatment for aged related macular degeneration
- You can still buy these supplements from community pharmacists, health food shops and some supermarkets.

If you would like a copy of this leaflet in alternative formats or languages please contact us on **0191 217 2599**

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## Important information about antioxidant vitamin and mineral supplements for age related macular degeneration

for example: Viteyes® Original, Bausch and Lomb PreserVision® Original tablets and ICaps®

This leaflet explains why your GP will no longer prescribe these antioxidant vitamin and mineral supplements. These are sometimes known as food, nutritional or dietary supplements.



## What are they for?

These products are sometimes prescribed for patients with a condition known as age related macular degeneration (ARMD).

## What is age related macular degeneration (ARMD)?

ARMD is the most common cause of vision loss in those aged over 50. It causes a gradual loss of central vision. Central vision is needed for detailed work and for things like reading and driving.

## How do antioxidant vitamin and mineral supplements work and why might they be used for ARMD?

There has been some clinical research to see if taking vitamins and minerals prevents the development of ARMD for people without the condition. It has also been considered for patients who have signs of early disease to slow down progression.

Despite some benefits for individual patients, there is no strong clinical evidence from this research to support the widespread use of food supplements to stop the development of ARMD in people who do not have the disease, or progression in those who have early disease.

These products are available to buy over the counter from community pharmacies, health food shops and some supermarkets. They are supplements and not medicines and as such there are not such tight controls over their production. As a result the quality and content of these products can vary.

## Why can't I get them from my GP anymore?

The NHS needs to make sure that it makes the best possible use

of the funding it receives so that it can continue to invest in new services and treatments to benefit patients.

NHS North of Tyne has reviewed the evidence available and decided that the use of these supplements for aged related macular degeneration is not clinically effective. Instead of funding these products with uncertain benefit, the money could be used more effectively for other drugs and treatments with better clinical evidence.

Although they contain naturally occurring ingredients, these supplements contain much higher doses of vitamins and minerals than recommended levels or what a normal diet would contain. The effects of these high doses taken over a long period of time are unknown.

## Can I still take these supplements?

You may still choose to buy antioxidant vitamin and mineral supplements as a dietary supplement. Ask your local community pharmacist for advice on a suitable product.

## Is it still safe to take these supplements?

If you have a long term health condition such as diabetes, heart or circulatory diseases then you should discuss the use of these supplements containing high doses of vitamins C and E with your GP or community pharmacist first. Some supplements are not suitable for people who smoke or recent ex-smokers.

**Patients with particular health conditions should always seek medical advice before taking health supplements.**