

# Eating well for eye health

With some key nutrients out there that can support our eye health, it's time to eat 'for' our eyes and not just 'with our eyes', writes **Pauline Dunne**

**D**iabetic retinopathy is a microvascular complication of diabetes, and a leading cause of vision loss and blindness globally. With prevalence of diabetes increasing worldwide, much focus has

been given to both preventing and managing diabetic retinopathy.

We are all familiar with the expression 'we eat with our eyes', but what about eating 'for' our eyes? Research studies have shown that there are several key nutrients that can support our eye health. This short article will offer some suggestions for how to easily include these key nutrients in our diets.

Many studies have shown that keeping blood glucose levels in target range can help reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications, such as diabetic retinopathy. This can be achieved through a variety of healthy habits such as taking medications as prescribed, taking regular exercise, avoiding smoking, and managing our stress levels.

Following a healthy active lifestyle

including a balanced diet, which is low in processed foods, limiting alcohol intake, and keeping weight in a healthy range, are all great investments in future health.

Talk to your doctor or nurse or consider attending a course to learn more about diabetes self-management. Courses are currently being delivered online instead of face-to-face because of ongoing Covid-related restrictions. For details of upcoming courses, see [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie) or phone our helpline on 01-8428118.

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## Dietary tips for eye health

<p><b>Dietary fibre</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fibre can improve our blood glucose control. Choose oats, wholegrain cereals and breads, fruits and vegetables and pulses such as beans, chickpeas, and lentils. It is a good idea to gradually increase your fibre intake to allow your body to adapt to it.</li> <li>• Eat fruit and vegetables rather than drinking as a juice or smoothie. The action of blending breaks down some of the fibrous structures so the liquid form can affect our blood glucose quite quickly.</li> <li>• Fibre absorbs water in the gut, so drinking the recommended 6 – 8 glasses of water every day is a must.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fruits and vegetables</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruits and vegetables are powerhouses of nutrition! They are a great source of fibre containing both soluble (the inside part) and insoluble (eg. the skins, seeds, pith), which combine forces to fill us up, and to slow down how quickly glucose gets released into our system.</li> <li>• Fruits and vegetables are also packed with vitamins, polyphenols, and flavonoids. Vary the colour to achieve a broad range of nutrients – think apples, oranges, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, spinach, broccoli, and kale.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Low glycaemic load</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced overall intake of refined carbohydrates (for example: simple sugars, processed cereals, white bread, biscuits, confectionary), and replace these with wholegrain or oat-based alternatives, which release glucose into the body more slowly. Including some fat, protein and fibre at meals can help to keep our blood glucose levels in range too.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Eat oily fish: Omega 3 and Omega 6 polyunsaturated fatty acids</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommendations advise people with diabetes to aim for two servings of oily fish weekly. Examples are salmon, trout, sardines, mackerel, kippers, and herrings. Fresh, frozen, or tinned, the benefits are within the fish itself. Just be mindful if choosing an oily fish which is tinned in oil to drain off the excess oil, and if choosing a smoked oily fish such as salmon or mackerel, the salt content is likely to be high.</li> <li>• Unsalted nuts, seeds and avocado also contain heart healthy fats.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mediterranean style diet</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meals should be predominantly plant-based with lots of vegetables, fruit, and legumes, a moderate amount of fish, and olive oil, and a low consumption of meat and its products. The diet is low in saturated fats (animal sources) but high in polyunsaturated fats (seeds, olive/rapeseed oil, oily fish).</li> <li>• Instead of salt, use pepper, garlic, lemon juice, herbs, and spices to add flavour to foods.</li> </ul>

See also some healthy eye recipes overleaf