

# Eating for Your Eye Health

## The situation

As we age, so do our eye. Vision problems usually creep up slowly. About 16 million people in the United States over the age of 45 report some vision loss. Regular vision checkups are very important but people are looking for information on how they can keep their eyes healthy longer. The most debilitating eye diseases are glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, retinal detachment and refractive errors. The greatest risk factor for most eye diseases is age. However, other factors may play a part in eye health, too.

## Extension response

In July 2008, the NDSU Extension Service, in collaboration with the North Dakota Optometric Association created an educational program called *Eating for Your Eyes*. The program focused on providing information on the parts of the eye and eye diseases, such as AMD, glaucoma and cataracts; identifying specific foods to promote good eye health as part of a balanced diet; and emphasizing the importance of having regular eye exams. The program consisted of a presentation which included hands-on small-group learning activities, displays, vision simulator cards, recipe cards, a short guide to AMD, and a handout on nutrition and what to eat for eye health. Burleigh County audiences have included the general public, ranging in age from 18 to 94 years, and persons providing services to seniors, either directly or indirectly. The program has been promoted through local media –newspapers, radio, noon television interviews, and community organizations. Resources have been requested by Bismarck optometrist and Bismarck Public Schools Family and Consumer Science teachers.

## Impacts

Based on forty participant post surveys, those attending indicated they plan to make the following changes as a result of their participation in the program.

- 60% planned to get more physical activity (such as walking)
- 83% planned to prepare meals that include green leafy vegetables (e.g., spinach)
- 78% planned to eat colorful fruits and vegetables more often
- 68% planned to eat eggs more often
- 50% planned to try a new food, such as kiwi, orange bell pepper or Swiss Chard
- 58% planned to use the recipes provided during the class
- 58% planned to wear ultraviolet (UV) sunglasses or a hat
- 83% will share program information with family/friends
- 83% rated their understanding of the information in the lesson as very good

One of the top 10 disabilities in the United States is vision impairment. More than 2 million Americans have severe AMD; another 7 million may have it and not know it. That is why this program is important for providing participants with strategies to help detect and prevent eye disease and to serve as a reminder to make an appointment with the eye doctor.

## Feedback

"These resources are just what I needed. My parents have macular degeneration and I am checked on a regular basis." –Parent with child at Bismarck Public Schools, 2009

"I'm going to eat more eggs." –Bismarck teacher

## Contact

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