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**General Chairman**  
**PRIP Frank J. Devlyn**  
 Email: devlynf@devlyn.com.mx  
 FAX: 52-5-2624120

**Assistant General Chairman**  
**O. Doyle Dannenberg, O.D.**  
 Email: doyled@nctimes.net  
 FAX: 1-760-746-0204

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Rotary International 2001-2002

# Avoidable Blindness

*"Next to life itself, God's most precious gift is sight - Protect it, Save it, Restore it."*

## Task Force

### Operation Eyesight Universal & Rotary Working Together

It is estimated that at least 7 million people become blind each year. 90% of the world's blind live in developing nations. 80% of the world's blindness is avoidable – it can be cured or prevented. The treatments for the prevention and cure of blindness are among the most successful and cost-effective of all health interventions.

Rotary International has made Avoidable Blindness a continuing priority with the aim of creating worldwide awareness of the magnitude of blindness and encouraging districts and clubs to support new programs to prevent blindness or restore sight.

Operation Eyesight Universal's *mission* is to encourage, develop and fund effective and sustainable blindness prevention and sight restoration programs directed to people in the greatest need. Our *vision* is that all may enjoy the **Gift of Sight**.

In partnership with Rotary Clubs and other caring supporters around the world, Operation Eyesight has examined and treated over 25 million men, women and children and restored to sight nearly two million individuals. OEU supports 48 active eye care programs are in 11 developing countries.

**Matching Grant Challenge**

Operation Eyesight Universal has established a Matching Grant Fund of \$250,000 that will be made available to Rotary Clubs wishing to support Avoidable Blindness projects. This will result in up to **\$500,000** for much-needed blind-

ness prevention and sight restoration initiatives around the world.

The fund will match donations of \$500 to \$1,500 for Diagnostic-Treatment-Education Camps, Surgical Eye Camps, and School Screening Camps.

Grant applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first served basis. The minimum commitment is \$500 (per camp) to a maximum of \$1,500. For each camp, your Club will receive a banner, photographs and detailed field report. Your Club may apply to sponsor one or more of the following types of camps:

- **Diagnostic-Treatment-Education Camps:** *In rural areas of the developing world, poor people have little chance to receive quality eye care. Eye doctors and eye care facilities are virtually non-existent. Rotary sponsored DTE Camps allow teams of trained professionals to diagnose and treat a wide variety of blinding eye ailments; bringing affordable, accessible eye care to those in need. Education helps to promote better eye health through improved hygiene, health and nutrition.*
- **Surgical Eye Camps:** *Each year, Operation Eyesight funds over 100,000 sight restoration and blindness prevention surgeries. Many of these operations are performed by ophthalmic surgeons affiliated with Rotary Eye Hospitals around the world. A Surgical Eye Camp will restore sight to between 40 and 120 individuals who suffer from curable*

## OEU & Rotary Working Together (*continued*)

*blindness (mainly cataracts or trachoma).*

- **School Screening Camps:** *Education and nutrition have a great bearing on the world's health. Worldwide, two hundred and fifty million children are Vitamin A deficient. Three hundred and fifty thousand will go blind and two million will die every year because of a lack of Vitamin A. Together, Rotarians and Operation Eyesight are saving children's eyesight and lives through*

*school screening programs and Vitamin A distribution. 73% of school-age children around the world who need corrective eyewear do not have eyeglasses. School Screening Camps incorporate eye exams and distribution of eyeglasses to those in need.*

To download a copy of an OEU/Rotary brochure, which includes a Matching Grant Application contribution form, go to the Downloads section of the Avoidable Blindness Task Force website.

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Check out the  
Operation Eyesight  
Universal website:  
[www.giftofsight.com](http://www.giftofsight.com)

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## Contributions to Avoidable Blindness Projects with Paul Harris Credit

*This update was provided by James Robinson, Humanitarian Grants Programs Division, The Rotary Foundation:*

At this time the Foundation is no longer restricting contributions for Avoidable Blindness to the Pools. According to the Trustee's October 2000 decision and the recent affirmation of this decision by the Trustee Chairman, the Foundation has stopped receiving contributions for Avoidable Blindness on 30

June 2001. No certificates of recognition are being provided at this time. Pursuant to the Trustees decision, contributions that the Foundation receives for Avoidable Blindness are being transferred to the Annual Programs Fund, which is used to support Avoidable Blindness Matching Grant projects that meet all Foundation criteria. Any contributions submitted to the Annual Programs Fund of The Rotary Foundation qualify for Paul Harris Credit.

## OEU Gift Cards & Certificates a Unique Idea

Having trouble buying a gift for that special someone? Is your club looking for a new and special way to thank speakers or volunteers? Why not give the *Gift of Sight* in the name of that special person? Your purchase will not only be meaningful, but it will literally change someone's life. An individual in the developing world will receive one of the most precious gifts of all; the *Gift of Sight*.

### **Gift Cards:**

OEU offers gift cards for all occasions, including birthdays, anniversaries, memorials, and season's greetings.

### **Certificates:**

Many clubs have found *Gift of Sight* certificates a meaningful way to say "Thank You" while also raising awareness of avoidable blindness. For just

\$30.00 each, Operation Eyesight will design a customized certificate for your club that has the additional benefit of giving a blind person the precious *Gift of Sight*.

All gift cards and certificates are sold individually and include a unique patient identification card, naming the individual restored to sight, thanks to your donation. You will also receive a tax creditable receipt for your contribution.

To order OEU gift cards & certificates:

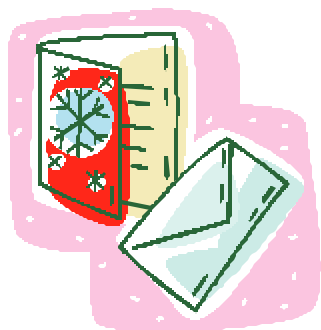
Call: 1-800-585-8265

FAX: 403-270-1899

Email: [oeuca@giftofsight.com](mailto:oeuca@giftofsight.com)

Mail: 4 Parkdale CR NW

Calgary, AB T2N 3T8



## Zinc, Antioxidants Stave Off Eye Disease

### Combination Can Prevent Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Amanda Gardner  
HealthScout News

A new study has found that a simple regimen of antioxidants along with high levels of zinc significantly reduces the risk of advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a leading cause of vision loss and blindness in the United States.

The results should benefit hundreds of thousands of Americans who currently have intermediate or advanced AMD in one eye.

The six-year study, conducted by the National Eye Institute and reported in the latest issue of the Archives of Ophthalmology, followed more than 3,500 people, aged 55 to 80, at 11 clinical sites around the country.

The volunteers, all with varying stages of AMD, were divided into groups according to the severity of their condition. The subjects were then randomly assigned to one of four treatment plans: 80 milligrams of zinc alone; antioxidants alone (500 milligrams of vitamin C, 400 IU of vitamin E, and 15 milligrams of beta-carotene); a combination of zinc and antioxidants, or a placebo.

Participants with intermediate or advanced AMD in only one eye who took the combination treatment lowered their risk of developing advanced stages of AMD by about 25 percent and their risk of vision loss by about 19 percent. Taken alone, zinc reduced the risk of advanced AMD by about 21 percent and the risk of vision loss by 11 percent. Antioxidants alone reduced the risk of developing advanced AMD by about 17 percent and the risk of vision loss by about 10 percent. "It's a very big deal to take a disease like AMD, for which there's really no markedly effective treatment, and prevent the development of this disorder in 25 percent of people," says study leader Dr. Frederick Ferris, clinical director at the National Eye Institute. "We were hoping for 10 to 20 percent. To get 25 percent was remarkable."

The study did not find any relation-

ship between the dietary supplements and the development of cataracts, another leading cause of visual impairment and blindness which can effectively be treated with surgery. A related study, reported in the same journal, found that high doses of vitamin C, vitamin E and beta carotene didn't lower the risk of age-related cataracts.

The antioxidant/zinc report "is an extremely good study, and it's reassuring to me as a practitioner because it's what I've been recommending to my patients for two years," says Dr. Anne Summers, a spokeswoman for the American Academy of Ophthalmology and a private practitioner in Ridgewood, N.J. "We know now that this is going to help my high-risk patients."

No one is quite sure why these dietary supplements are effective, but researchers have long been interested in zinc as a possible remedy for vision loss because it is found in unusually high concentrations in cells right under the retina of the eye. A small clinical trial conducted in the mid-1980s showed a benefit from zinc and led to the marketing of a number of products. That study, however, was very small and other evidence proved inconsistent.

Based on the new study, the National Eye Institute is recommending that anyone older than 55 have dilated eye examinations to determine their risk of advanced AMD. Risk is determined by looking at the size and number of drusen, which are yellowish-white deposits under the retina. Those with extensive medium-size drusen or at least one large drusen in one eye may be at risk and may benefit from taking the dietary supplements.

Although the dietary supplement regimen is relatively simple, cheap and available over the counter, there are some caveats, so it's worth consulting your physician before starting. "This is not chicken soup, and you're taking high doses of these supplements, and there could be consequences," warns Ferris. A few side effects were reported in the study, mainly genitourinary problems in a small number of people who took zinc




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*Looking for answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Avoidable Blindness Projects?*

*Check out the newly revised FAQ page on the ABTF website!*

*[www.rotarytaskforces.org/avoidable\\_blindness](http://www.rotarytaskforces.org/avoidable_blindness)*

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Since we observe Thanksgiving Day traditionally in November in the United States it seemed appropriate to share these thoughts on Thanksgiving this month.

- The art of thanksgiving is thanksgiving. It is gratitude in action. It is applying Albert Schweitzer's philosophy: "In gratitude for your own good fortune you must render in return some sacrifice of your life for other life.
- It is thanking God for the gift of life by living it triumphantly. It is thanking God for your talents and abilities by accepting them as obligations to be invested for the common good.
- It is thanking God for all that men and women have done for you by doing things for others. It is thanking God for opportunities by accepting them as a challenge to achievement.
- It is thanking God for happiness by striving to make others happy. It is thanking God for beauty by helping others to make the world more beautiful.
- It is thanking God for inspiration by trying to be an inspiration to others. It is thanking God for health and strength by the care and reverence you show your body.
- It is thanking God for creative ideas that enrich life by adding your own creative contributions to human progress. It is thanking God for each new day by living it to its fullest in service to others.
- It is thanking God by giving hands, arms, legs and voices to your thankful spirit. It is adding to your prayers of thanksgiving, acts of thanksgiving.

(Copied from the Art of Living by Wilferd A. Peterson)



As Rotarians it is being thankful for the heritage that is ours "to serve others in our communities, our nations, and around the world to further understanding, peace and goodwill among and for all -- because "MANKIND IS OUR BUSINESS".

O. Doyle Dannenberg  
Assistant General Chairman ABTF

## Zinc, Antioxidants (*continued*)

(either in combination or alone); a slightly higher rate of anemia among participants taking zinc and yellowing of the skin in some participants taking beta-carotene.

Beta-carotene is not recommended for smokers because it has been shown to increase the risk of lung cancer. And high levels of zinc always should be accompanied by copper supplements to reduce the risk of copper-deficiency anemia. There's also a possibility that the zinc and the antioxidants will interact with prescription and other over-the-counter medications.

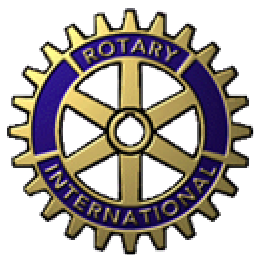
One final word of caution: Because the study participants were overwhelmingly (96 percent) white and well nourished, the benefits may not extend to the general population.

The participants will continue to be monitored for five years to assess long-term effects and possible complications,

although without a placebo comparison group. The at-risk participants who were taking a placebo are now all happily taking the supplements.

In the related study on cataracts, 4,629 people took either antioxidants, antioxidants and zinc, zinc only or an inactive substance. The researchers found "no apparent effect on the seven-year risk of development or progression of age-related lens opacities or visual acuity loss."

SOURCES: Interviews with Frederick Ferris, M.D., clinical director, National Eye Institute, Bethesda, Md., and Anne Summers, M.D., spokeswoman, American Academy of Ophthalmology, Ridgewood, N.J.; October 2001 Archives of Ophthalmology  
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