



MACULAR DEGENERATION

THE LEADING CAUSE OF AGE-RELATED BLINDNESS

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) affects the macula — the central most part of the retina, which is the inner layer at the back of the eye responsible for detailed central vision. The macula is used for reading, driving and recognizing people's faces. Macular degeneration causes the center of your vision to blur or distort while the side or peripheral vision remains unaffected. It is generally related to the aging process, and is the leading cause of blindness in North America in adults over the age of 55. While there is no cure, early detection and preventative measures can delay or reduce vision loss.

There are two types of AMD: dry and wet, with the dry form being more common. It is also the milder form, where there is a gradual degeneration of the central retinal tissues that make up the macula and symptoms generally develop slowly over time. The wet form is a sudden leakage, or bleeding, from weak blood vessels under the macula and symptoms progress rapidly. Wet AMD accounts for approximately 10 per cent of all cases, but the dry form can develop into the wet form over time.

SYMPTOMS

In the earliest stages, macular degeneration is entirely symptom free but can be detected during routine eye examinations by your optometrist. The most common initial symptom is slightly wavy or distorted central vision when performing tasks that require seeing detail. This blurred spot, or sense there is dirt in the way of clear vision, cannot be corrected with eyewear. Over time, the damaged area may increase in size and interfere with reading and recognizing faces. Patients don't experience any pain with AMD.

TREATMENT

Early detection is crucial as there is currently no cure for AMD. Dry AMD is treated with lifestyle modifications like exercise, wearing sunglasses to reduce UV radiation and stopping smoking. Many cases of wet AMD can be treated with injections of anti-VEGF therapy into the eye to stop leaking blood vessels. Ocular vitamin supplements including lutein, zeaxanthin, and vitamins C, E and Zinc, can also assist in slowing the progression of AMD.

PREVENTION

Lifelong UV protection and good nutrition are believed to play key roles in preventing AMD. Living a healthy lifestyle by keeping your blood pressure down, reducing your intake of fatty foods and not smoking are all recommended. A diet high in antioxidants, such as those found in fruits and leafy vegetables, may help prevent AMD. Regular eye examinations by your optometrist are also important in the early detection of AMD.

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