

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT

MACULAR DEGENERATION

What is macular degeneration?

Macular degeneration is an eye disease that occurs when there are changes to central vision or macula. The macula is a small portion of the retina that is located on the inside back layer of the eye and is used to focus on details. Macular degeneration reduces central vision and makes seeing objects and details straight ahead difficult or impossible.

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss among people over age 50.

What causes macular degeneration?

There are two types of age-related macular degeneration.

In the "dry," or atrophic type, the tissue of the macula gradually becomes thin, scars, and stops functioning properly.

"Wet," or exudative macular degeneration is less common and results when fluids leak from newly formed blood vessels under the macula and blur central vision. Vision loss from the "wet" form can be rapid and severe.

What are signs/symptoms of macular degeneration?

Some signs/symptoms of macular degeneration are:

- Gradual loss of the ability to see objects clearly in the central vision;
- Objects appear to be distorted in shape and straight lines appear wavy or crooked;
- Loss of clear color vision;
- A dark or empty area appearing in the center of vision.

In the early stages, signs/symptoms of macular degeneration may not be noticeable, so regular eye examinations are important in early detection.

How is macular degeneration diagnosed?

The signs/symptoms of macular degeneration can also indicate other eye health problems, so if you experience any of them, you should contact your doctor of optometry immediately.

In a thorough eye examination, your optometrist can perform a variety of tests to determine if you have macular degeneration or other eye health problems.

How is macular degeneration treated?

There is no cure for "dry" macular degeneration; nor can central vision lost to macular degeneration be restored. Much research is being done for patients with macular degeneration and we are hopeful that someday soon we will have medical treatments to prevent the progression of this disease.

If it is detected early, the "wet" form of macular degeneration can be treated using Anti-VEGF (vascular endothelial growth factor) medications injected into the back of the eye. This reduces new blood vessel growth and decreases leakage and swelling. This is not a permanent cure, but it can be used to slow the rate of central vision loss.

However, doctors do believe there is a link between nutrition and the progression of “dry” macular degeneration. They suggest that a low-fat diet, rich in green leafy vegetables, including spinach, some types of leaf lettuce and broccoli, can slow vision loss due to macular degeneration.

There are also nutritional supplements that may be beneficial. Ask your doctor of optometry about your individual case.

Low vision devices such as telescopic and microscopic lenses, magnifying glasses, illuminated magnifiers and closed circuit television systems can often be prescribed to help make the most effective use of remaining vision and restore function.

Macular degeneration is one of the most highly researched areas of eye diseases. Ask your optometrist about this research and appropriate referral sources for advanced treatment.

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