



Age-Related Macular Degeneration

By Jonna Jefferis & Daniel Levy, O.D.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a leading cause of visual impairment and blindness for older Americans.

AMD affects more than 1.75 million people in the U.S., according to the National Eye Institute (NEI). As the population ages, an explosion of new cases is expected. The NEI predicts that cases of this potentially devastating disease among Americans will increase to 2.95 million in 2020.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a leading cause of vision impairment among people over age 50. It is caused by changes in the macula, which is located in the retina, on the inside back layer of the eye. The macula is responsible for sharp central vision. A healthy macula is essential for driving, reading and other tasks requiring straight-ahead focusing.

There are two types of AMD: dry and wet. The dry type, which for some people is associated with the aging process, is the most common, accounting for 85% of all cases. In dry AMD, macula tissue gradually becomes thin and stops functioning properly. Currently, there is no treatment available for dry AMD.

Wet AMD is less common but more serious. It can result from a progression of the dry form. In wet AMD, abnormal blood vessels begin to grow and leak fluid under the macula. This causes vision to become distorted. The condition can sometimes be treated with laser surgery or drug therapy to destroy the leaky blood vessels.

AMD is painless, and symptoms are not always apparent. They include:

- Blurry central vision. Objects may appear distorted.
- A dark or empty area in the center of vision.
- Straight lines appearing wavy or crooked.
- Gradual loss of clear color vision. Colors may appear as less intense.

These symptoms may also indicate a condition other than AMD. If you experience any of them, contact your eye doctor as soon as possible. He or she will perform a variety of tests to determine their cause.

If you have already lost part of your vision, low-vision aids can be prescribed to help make the most of your remaining vision. These include special telescopic and microscopic lenses, magnifying glasses and electronic magnifiers for close work.

No treatment will restore vision that has already been lost. But the earlier AMD is detected, the more successful treatment can be. The most important thing you can do to protect your eyes is to get regular comprehensive eye exams. If you have AMD, this will enable your doctor to detect and treat it in its earliest stage. A healthy diet and exercise can be beneficial in maintaining healthy sight.

Sources: AMD Alliance, American Optometric Association

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