

Hope for those with Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of visual impairment for individuals age 50 and older. Although there is currently no cure, there is hope for those with AMD.

As part of Age-Related Macular Degeneration / Low Vision Awareness Month in March, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Eye M.D.s across the nation urges local residents to be screened for age-related vision problems by having regular eye exams and talking with their Eye M.D. about new treatments and low vision resources, if experiencing vision loss.

Macular degeneration is a progressive, usually painless disease that affects the macula, the spot on the retina at the back of the eye responsible for central vision, causing central vision to blur, but leaving peripheral vision intact. If you should experience any of the following, see your Eye M.D. right away:

- Straight lines appear wavy
- Difficulty seeing at a distance
- Decreased ability to distinguish colors
- Inability to see details, such as faces or words in a book
- Dark or empty spots block the center of your vision

Several studies have also shown the following individuals may be at risk:

- People over age 50
- People with hypertension
- People that smoke
- People with a family history of AMD

Research continues for AMD treatments, and there are increasingly effective treatments becoming available in the near future. For example, current findings show that high levels of zinc and antioxidants can play a key role in slowing the progression of advanced AMD. Conventional laser, photodynamic therapy and intraocular injections of anti-vascular endothelial growth factors can reduce the risk of moderate to severe vision loss in patients with specific forms of "wet" macular degeneration. Other experimental treatments, including the insertion of a "retinal chip" which may restore vision loss are also currently being investigated.

For now, however, people should beware of claims being made on the Internet, in newspapers and in magazines announcing cures for macular degeneration. Investigate the claims thoroughly and talk with your Eye M.D. before undergoing any treatments. Most of these treatments have not been proven safe or effective and may be very costly.

Vision loss does not have to mean loss of independence or quality of life. If you have low vision, ask your Eye M.D. about low vision rehabilitation. He or she can provide low vision services or refer you to local agencies that can help.

Early detection and treatment is the best defense against losing your vision. If you are at risk for macular degeneration, see your Eye M.D. for a complete eye exam at least every one to two years.

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