



The Facts about...

Macular Degeneration

What is Macular Degeneration?

Macular degeneration is a term that describes problems with the macular - a tiny part of the retina that is responsible for all or our central vision.

Most people associate macular degeneration with getting older - and, indeed, age-related macular degeneration is the most common cause of sight loss in the developed world and affects over 600,000 people in the UK.

There are other, less common, types of macular degeneration which are rare and inherited conditions. Some appear in childhood but some are not diagnosed until later in life.

Age Related Macular Degeneration [AMD]

Macular disease affects central vision but does not cause complete sight loss - some peripheral vision remains. Central vision may become blurry or distorted and gaps or dark spots may appear in your vision. As the disease progresses your ability to see clearly will change.

There are 2 types of Macular Degeneration:

Wet Age Related Macular Degeneration

- Wet AMD is caused by abnormal blood vessels growing and leaking into the macula. Scarring results and causes rapid loss of central vision. This condition can develop very suddenly but *can be treated if caught early*.
- Treatment involves injection into the eye of drugs that will stop the growth of the abnormal blood vessels. These injections will usually be carried out on a monthly basis for 3 months and assessment will then be carried out to see whether further treatment is required. The injections are made only after the eye has been anaesthetised and so are painless.
- Occasionally, laser treatment may be used if injections are unsuccessful.

Dry Age Related Macular Degeneration

- Dry AMD occurs when retinal cells die and are not renewed - so it is a slow and gradual process that takes place over months or years. There is currently no treatment for dry AMD.
- Approximately 10 - 15% of people with dry AMD will go on to develop wet AMD. **If you have dry AMD and notice a sudden change in your vision you need to seek medical advice.**
- If you have dry AMD in one eye, it may also develop in the other. Again, seek medical advice if you notice changes in vision in either eye.

Symptoms of Macular Degeneration

The first symptom is often blurred or distorted area in your vision. As it worsens you may struggle to see anything in your central vision.

AMD can make it difficult to do things like reading, watching TV or driving.

People with AMD may also notice that they see straight lines as wavy or crooked, that objects look smaller than usual, colours are less bright or that they see things that aren't there [hallucinations].

AMD is not painful and does not affect the appearance of the eye[s].

Making Life Easier for People with Macular Degeneration

There are steps that can be taken to make life easier for people who have AMD. Things that make life easier for someone with AMD include:

- Good lighting - bright and even general lighting together with good task lighting
- Pale walls and ceilings reflect light back into a room.
- Differentiate between wall and door colour or curtains.
- Ensure that dining areas are well-lit and use the principle of colour and contrast to make plates, knives, forks etc. more visible. Wrapping brightly coloured tape around the handles of utensils and tools can make them easier to find.
- Investigate “talking” kitchen items, including scales.
- Pegging shoes together in pairs
- Hanging colour-co-ordinating outfits together
- Apply toothpaste to your finger and then apply to the brush
- Use a pill box organiser for medication
- Invest in a big buttoned phone. Programme speed dial to store numbers which can be called at the touch of one button.
- Register for BT’s free directory enquiries service by ringing 0800 587 0195.
- Sit close to the TV screen, sitting at a 45 degree angle to the screen, or use a telescopic magnifier
- Subscribe to the weekly “Big Print” newspaper
- Ask your GP for a referral to a Rehabilitation Officer for the Visually Impaired service - ROVIs can teach people with AMD to move around safely, including outside the home
- You may be eligible for discounted bus or train fares - contact the relevant companies for more information.
- Subscribe to the RNIB Talking Books service - they have more than 200,000 books available as well as newspapers.

Looking After Your Eyes

- Have regular eye tests - at least one every 2 years
- Stop smoking - the association between smoking and AMD is as strong as the link between smoking and cancer
- Eat healthily - a diet low in saturated fats but rich in green leafy vegetables such as spinach or broccoli may help delay the progression of cataracts and AMD. Oranges, kiwis, nuts, seeds and oily fish may also prevent some eye conditions. Maintaining a healthy weight reduces the risk of diabetes and related eye conditions.
- Protect your eyes in the sun

Further Information

The Macular Society <https://www.macularsociety.org>

Royal National Institute for the Blind [RNIB] <https://www.rnib.org.uk>

Moorfields Hospital Medical Retina Service

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/service/medical-retina>

To contact Share and Care Homeshare:

Tel: 020 3865 3398 or 020 8405 6316

E-mail: info@shareandcare.co.uk

Website: www.shareandcare.co.uk

Follow us on Social Media

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This fact sheet should only be used as a guideline and we recommend you seek professional advice.