



Macular Degeneration – FAQ’s

What is Macular Degeneration?

Macular Degeneration is a group of diseases characterized by a breakdown of the macula. The macula is the center portion of the retina that makes central vision and visual acuity possible.

The retina is the delicate innermost layer of tissue that lines the eye. It contains layers of light receiving cells called photoreceptors that are connected to the brain by the optic nerve. If you think of the eye as a camera, the retina is the film on which images are recorded and the macula is the small, central part of the retina.

What Causes Macular Degeneration?

Early onset forms of macular degeneration are genetic — programmed into your cells and not caused by injury, infection or any other environmental factors. Certain genes necessary for normal vision give faulty messages to the cells in the macula, which leads to their progressive degeneration and eventual loss of vision.

Macular degeneration, is the leading cause of vision loss in adults over the age of 55. Studies have found that both genetic and environmental risk factors influence the disease.

What Are Some of the Questions I Should Ask My Eye Doctor?

- What is the name of my eye condition?
- What is my visual acuity (central vision)?
- What is my visual field (side vision)?
- Am I likely to lose more vision?
- Are there other tests?

- Are there any surgical options?
 - Are there any optical or non-optical aids that can help me use my remaining vision better?
 - Should I have a low-vision evaluation?
 - Are there any mobility aids to help me move around more safely?
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What Are the Symptoms of Macular Degeneration?

- Blurring of Central Vision
 - Difficulty Seeing Detail — Up Close and at a Distance
 - Distortion of Lines and Shapes
 - Diminished Color Vision
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Can my Ophthalmologist Diagnose Macular Degeneration?

Possibly, however, if you experience either of the symptoms noted above and your ophthalmologist isn't certain, you should consult with a retinal specialist. The Foundation maintains a list of doctors who specialize in retinal degenerative diseases.

Are There Special Tests to Diagnose Macular Degeneration?

Yes.

Your doctor will examine your eyes with special lenses to view the interior of the eye through the pupil. Other tests for macular degeneration include:

Acuity Tests: This test measures the accuracy of your central vision at specific distances in specific lighting situations.

Amsler Grid Test: This test checks for spots of sight loss.

Color Testing: This can help determine the status of your cone cells, the retinal cells that interpret color.

Fluorescein Angiogram Test: This test allows your doctor to visualize the inner structure of the eye. Photos are taken of the retina and the macula in order to identify new blood vessel growth and leakage from blood vessels.

Can Macular Degeneration Lead to Total Blindness?

Most people with macular degeneration retain peripheral vision and learn to optimize the use of their remaining vision. Legally blind individuals are those whose best visual acuity or sharpness (with glasses or contact lenses, if needed) is 20/200 or worse in their better eye; or whose visual field, regardless of acuity, is restricted to a 20 degree diameter (10 degree radius).

Can Macular Degeneration be Prevented?

At present, there is no known way to prevent macular degeneration. For now, the most important thing to do is to have regular eye exams, which may allow early detection and diagnosis. This is particularly important if a close relative has been diagnosed with macular degeneration.

There are also several areas of research that offer tremendous promise for halting the disease or restoring vision loss:

- Retinal Cell Transplants
- Pharmaceutical therapy
- Nutritional Therapy
- Gene Therapy

For additional information on these or any other areas of our research, please scroll back to the Home Page or to the Master macular degeneration page.

Is there a Treatment for Macular Degeneration?

Laser photocoagulation can help some people with wet macular degeneration. In this treatment, laser light rays are directed into the eye and focused on a small spot on the macula. The laser destroys the blood vessels growing beneath the retina and seals leaky areas. This treatment does not restore lost vision, so it is critical that it be applied as early as possible before vision loss has progressed

significantly. There are also several experimental treatments being evaluated in clinical trials.

How Quickly Does Macular Degeneration Progress?

It's different for every patient, however, wet AMD progresses more quickly than dry AMD.

Are There Any Special Risk Factors for Macular Degeneration?

Potentially,

- History of hypertension
 - History of cardiovascular disease
 - Smoking
 - Sun Exposure
 - Hyperopia (farsightedness)
 - Light Skin & Eye Color
 - Lens Opacities (cataracts)
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If I have Drusen, Does that Mean I'll Develop Macular Degeneration?

Not necessarily. Drusen are deposits that contain complex lipids (fats) and calcium that can accumulate as a person ages. Many people have drusen in both eyes and have no vision impairment. If your eye doctor detects drusen in your eyes, you should continue to seek eye care regularly and use an Amsler Grid to monitor your vision.

Can an Eye Transplant Cure Macular Degeneration?

No. Medical technology is not yet advanced enough to transplant the entire eye.

Are Cataracts Associated with Macular Degeneration?

No, however, it is not unusual for an older person with macular degeneration to also develop cataracts, which is a clouding of the lens of the eye.