
What Is Macular Degeneration?

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Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration is one of the leading causes of blindness and the number of people impacted by the disease is increasing. The most common form is Age-Related Macular Degeneration or AMD.

The eye surgeons at Penn Highlands Eye Center treat thousands of patients each year and can help you monitor your condition and maintain a more normal level of sight when macular degeneration begins to impair your vision.

The macula is the central part of the retina, which is the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. The retina processes all visual images and is responsible for your ability to read, recognize faces, drive and see colors clearly. Macular degeneration causes progressive macular damage resulting in loss of central vision. This loss of vision could become severe.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A decrease in vision is not an inevitable consequence of getting older. The need for more light to see well, sensitivity to glare, decreased night vision and poor color sensitivity, all mean there is something wrong.

Symptoms include:

- Difficulty in reading or doing any activity requiring good vision
- Distortion of lines or other items that may appear wavy or bent
- Difficulty distinguishing faces or anything in your central vision
- Dark patches or empty spaces appear in the center of what you're seeing

- Macular degeneration can be detected in its very early stage by medical examination of the retina before any visual symptoms occur. Early detection is crucial because any loss of vision cannot be reversed. If you wait until you have symptoms, it may be too late.

As you would expect by the name, age is a major risk factor for AMD. It mostly occurs in people over the age of 60 but some people experience macular degeneration earlier. Other risk factors include:

- Smoking - Smokers have twice the risk of developing AMD.
- Race. Caucasians are more likely to have AMD than African-Americans or those of Hispanic origin.
- Family history and genetics - People with a family history of the disease are at a much higher risk of suffering from AMD.

Lifestyle choices have been proven to help reduce your risk of having AMD and may also help slow the development of the disease:

- Avoid smoking
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Do things to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol at normal levels
- Eat a healthy diet and focus on adding green, leafy vegetables and fish

WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Macular degeneration is a progressive disease. Current treatments focus on preserving as much vision as possible and slowing the progression of the disease. It's important to talk to your doctor and have an understanding about the stage and type of the disease, as treatment options depend on these factors. There are several treatment options that can help but there is presently no cure for macular degeneration.
