

Macular Degeneration



If You're Over 40,
You Could Have This Eye
Condition & Not Know It.

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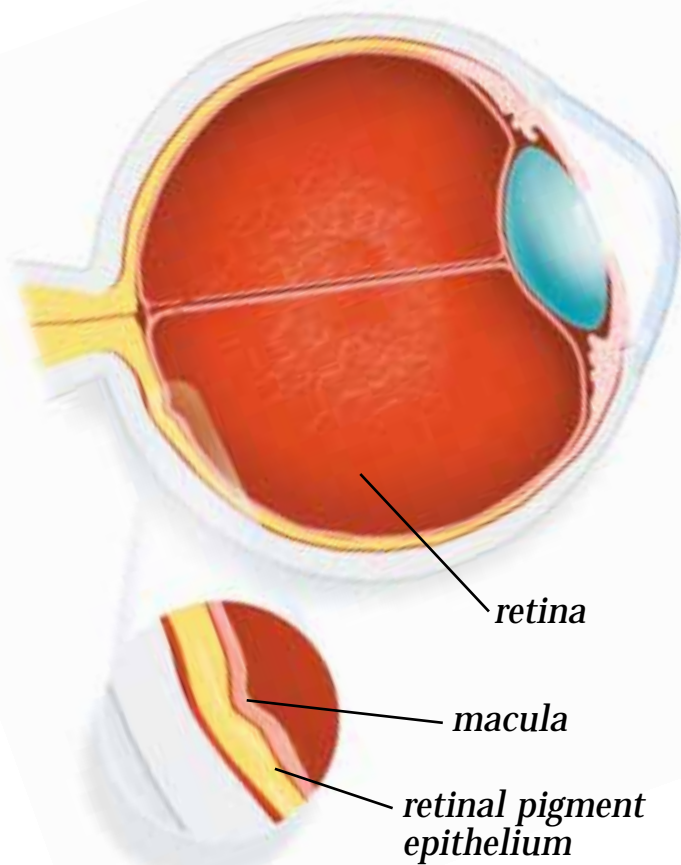
Part number: 081294

Printed in USA

What Is Macular Degeneration?

Macular degeneration is a condition of the eye that is often related to aging. It is commonly referred to as age-related macular degeneration, and is abbreviated as AMD.

While its cause is unknown, the early or late stage of AMD affects about 8.5 million Americans over the age of 40. The late stage, associated with vision loss, is the most common cause of legal blindness in people over the age of 50 in the western world.



In AMD, the macula of the eye is affected. The macula, is located at the center of the retina, a light-sensitive tissue which lines the back of the eye. The retina receives images of external objects, then sends them as impulses to the brain.

The macula provides us with central vision and allows us to see fine detail, such as recognizing a face, reading, or watching television. When the macula becomes damaged, extreme and dramatic vision loss can occur.

The early stages of AMD typically start with the appearance of spots beneath the retina. These spots, called drusen, are small, round, lesions which usually do not change vision very much in and of themselves. Most people with drusen will never have a serious loss of vision.

However, certain changes may occur that lead to the late stage of AMD which is usually accompanied by vision loss. Most often vision loss starts in one eye. Because the healthy eye compensates for the loss of vision in the damaged eye, macular degeneration may initially go unnoticed. In some cases it will also affect vision in the other eye.



When a person's central vision becomes affected by the late stage of macular degeneration, this may be how they see their world.

There Are Two Forms Of AMD

The two forms of the late stages of AMD are as known as dry AMD and wet AMD.

When the early stage drusen are present for a long time, they probably cause the macula to become thinner (atrophic) and stop functioning. This is referred to as the dry form of AMD. This may cause some people to detect "blank" areas in their central vision. While there are no treatments and no preventive measures currently available for people with dry AMD, various vision aids including magnifiers, are available to help these people continue to live their lives as normally as possible.

The wet form of AMD is responsible for up to 90% of the severe vision loss associated with this condition.

Wet AMD is caused by the growth of abnormal blood vessels across the macula and beneath the retinal pigment epithelium layer of the retina.

As these abnormal vessels leak fluid and blood into the tissue at the back of the eye, scar tissue typically forms and loss of vision may occur.

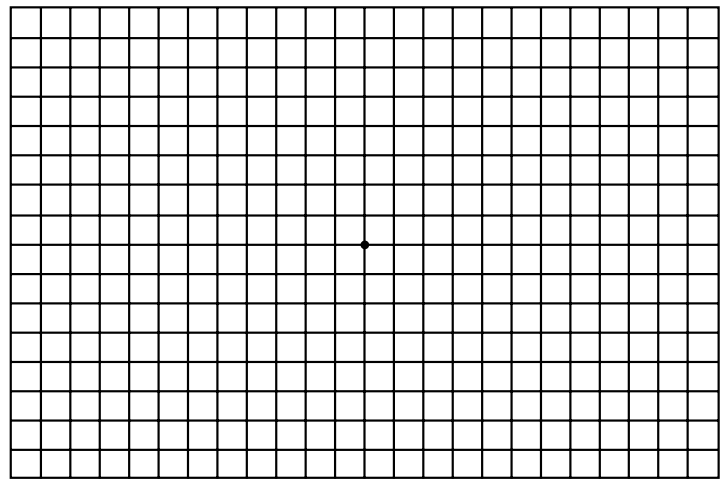


How Wet AMD Is Detected.

In the early stages of wet AMD, a person's vision may become blurred or distorted. Therefore, an easy and effective way to test and possibly detect the smallest vision changes caused by wet AMD when they first appear is by using the Amsler Grid. Many doctors give their patients this simple visual test to take home with them. The patients can test themselves on a regular basis and alert their doctor if there are any changes between regular medical eye exams.

To use the Amsler Grid, follow these simple instructions:

- 1 If you use reading glasses, be sure that you are wearing them.
- 2 Cover one eye, and look at the center dot.
- 3 Keep your eye focused at all times.
- 4 Look directly at the center dot and only at the center dot.
- 5 All of the lines should appear straight. All of the squares should be the same size.
- 6 Do this test for each eye separately.

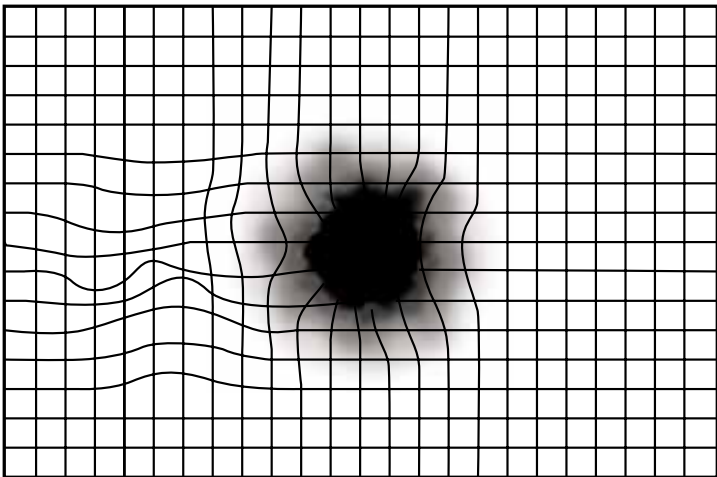


Test for AMD with this side

Remove this card and use it to test your vision for wet AMD regularly

If any area on the grid suddenly appears blurred, distorted, discolored, or in any way appears abnormal to a person taking this test, they are urged to contact their eye care professional immediately. He or she should then conduct the appropriate diagnostic exams to test the person's visual function and assess the health of the retina.





What you might see with wet AMD

What A Person With Wet AMD Might See

Shown above is an example of the distortion a person may experience due to the recent onset of macular degeneration, where the grid may have appeared normal one month before.

However, since many patients with drusen, or the early stage of macular degeneration have no symptoms that would be detected by using the Amsler Grid, regular medical eye checks by an eye care professional are strongly recommended for everyone after age 40.

It is also important to know that eyes with drusen or dry AMD can progress into wet AMD. Therefore, if a person has been diagnosed with dry AMD, the Amsler Grid may still be useful. These persons should consider using it to regularly monitor their central vision and report any new changes to their eye care professional.

How Wet AMD Is Treated

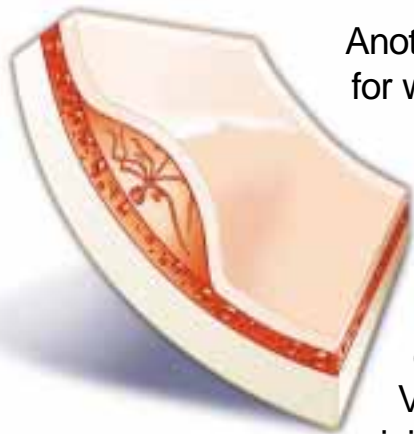
There are two treatments available for patients with wet AMD. One of these is laser photocoagulation. While this process usually cannot restore lost vision, it seals leaky blood vessels and inhibits their growth in selected cases. This prevents further vision deterioration in a small percentage of wet AMD cases.

In laser photocoagulation, a laser is used to provide a concentrated beam of high-energy light. When the light comes in contact with the parts of the retina to be treated, it turns to heat and destroys the abnormal blood vessels.

As a result, a scar forms in the area treated, creating a permanent blind spot in the field of vision. That is because laser photocoagulation also destroys overlying retinal tissue. However, the loss of vision is usually less severe than the eventual loss of vision that usually occurs if laser treatment is not performed.



Another Option



Another treatment for wet AMD is Visudyne™ therapy. In this procedure, a light-activated drug known as Visudyne™ is injected into the patient's

bloodstream. Once the drug reaches the retina, it is activated by a non-thermal laser (A laser that does not burn the retina). This produces a clot that closes the abnormal vessels without causing damage to the overlying sensory retina.

The abnormal blood vessels may return after several months. However, Visudyne therapy can be reapplied at up to 3 month intervals if necessary.



Visudyne therapy destroys abnormal blood vessels

What You Should Do If You Suspect You Have Wet AMD

Only an eye care professional can diagnose wet AMD. See your eye care provider if you suspect you may be at risk. This is important, as wet AMD can affect vision very rapidly. Vision loss associated with wet AMD is like a train traveling down a mountain. The goal of treatment is to slow or stop the train from its descent – that is, to slow or stop the progression of vision loss. Therapy can not push the train back up the hill, as any vision loss already experienced is permanent.

Everyone over the age of 40 should have regular medical eye exams performed by an eye care professional. They should also use the Amsler Grid to test themselves between checkups.

Because AMD probably has a hereditary component, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that persons over 40 who have relatives with AMD should have a retinal exam every two years.

Once wet AMD is diagnosed, proper treatment can confine visual loss to a smaller area than would occur without treatment.

Again, the first step toward "slowing down the wet AMD train" is to find out as quickly as possible if it has "started going down the hill." If you feel you could be at risk, please see an eye care professional immediately.