

AGE RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a leading cause of blindness in the United States. It is the number one cause of severe vision loss in people over 50. AMD is a disease of the retina. The retina is located inside the eye and is comparable to film in a camera. When an eye is damaged from macular degeneration, there can be distortion, waviness, or a blind spot in the central vision. Oftentimes, straight objects like a telephone pole will appear to be notched or jagged. Peripheral vision, however, is not affected, even in people with severe disease.

There are several factors that increase a person's risk of AMD. The greatest of these is age. Macular degeneration is most often seen in people over the age of 50. Ethnicity is also important as Caucasians are at a higher risk for AMD. As with most medical conditions, it is strongly connected to genetics, so a family history also increases your risk.

Losing vision is a scary thought for anyone. So what can be done to protect your eyes from macular degeneration? Unfortunately, all the risk factors listed above are beyond our control. No one can choose their family or stop themselves from aging. However, we can choose whether or not to smoke. You can add macular degeneration to the long list of diseases made worse by smoking. Smoking doubles your risk of macular degeneration. This is one more good reason to quit. There is also some evidence that high levels of UV exposure can increase the risk of AMD, so wearing sunglasses with UV protection is a good idea.

More can be done for people who already have macular degeneration. Since there can be no symptoms in early macular degeneration, it is important to have regular screening eye exams, especially in people over 50 years of age. Studies have proven that high levels of antioxidant vitamins (vitamin C, vitamin E, beta-carotene, zinc) can be helpful in those diagnosed with macular degeneration. Other supplements such as lutein, zeaxanthin, and omega-3 fatty acids may also be helpful in slowing down AMD. Finally, there are medicines called VEGF inhibitors that are given to people with severe macular degeneration. The discovery of VEGF inhibitors for AMD is probably the greatest advancement in Ophthalmology over the last decade. With our sunny skies and high Caucasian population, greater awareness of macular degeneration is vital to those living on the western slope. To learn more, visit montroseeyes.com.

Christopher Huot, MD is a Board Certified Ophthalmologist on the Medical Staff at MMH