

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

Summary

AMD is a problem with your retina. You lose your central vision, but your peripheral (side) vision will still be normal. There are two forms of AMD: dry and wet. There is no treatment for dry AMD, though certain vitamins and minerals might help with reducing progression. Wet AMD may be treated with medication or laser surgery. It is important to see your ophthalmologist regularly to check for eye and vision changes.

What is age-related macular degeneration?

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a problem with your retina. It happens when a part of the retina called the macula is damaged. With AMD you lose your central vision. You cannot see fine details, whether you are looking at something close or far. But your peripheral (side) vision will still be normal. For instance, imagine you are looking at a clock with hands. With AMD, you might see the clock's numbers but not the hands. AMD is very common. It is a leading cause of vision loss in people 50 years or older.

Two types of AMD

Dry AMD: This form is quite common. About 80% of people who have AMD have the dry form. Dry AMD is when parts of the macula get thinner with age and tiny clumps of protein called drusen grow. You slowly lose central vision. There is no way to treat dry AMD yet.

Wet AMD: This form is less common but much more serious. Wet AMD is when new, abnormal blood vessels grow under the retina. These vessels may leak blood or other fluids, causing scarring of the macula. You lose vision faster with wet AMD than with dry AMD. Many people don't realize they have AMD until their vision is very blurry. This is why it is important to have regular visits to an ophthalmologist. The doctor can look for early signs of AMD before you have any vision problems.

Who is at risk for getting AMD?

You are more likely to develop AMD if you are overweight, eat a diet high in saturated fat (found in foods like meat, butter, and cheese) smoke cigarettes, are over 50 years old, have hypertension (high blood pressure), have a family history of AMD, having heart disease and high cholesterol levels. Caucasians have an elevated risk of getting AMD.

How is AMD diagnosed?

During an eye exam, your ophthalmologist may ask you to look at an Amsler grid. This grid helps you notice any blurry or blank spots in your field of vision. Your ophthalmologist will also look inside your eye through a special lens. The doctor can see if there are changes in the retina and macula. Your eye doctor will put drops in your eye to dilate (widen) your pupil. This allows the doctor to look through a special lens at the inside of your eye looking for abnormal new blood vessels growing under the retina. Optical coherence tomography (OCT) is another way to look closely at the retina. A machine scans the retina and provides very detailed images of the retina and macula.

How is AMD treated?

Dry AMD: Right now, there is no way to treat the dry form of AMD. However people with lots of drusen or serious vision loss might benefit from taking a certain combination of nutritional supplements. A large study found those people may slow their dry AMD by taking these vitamins and minerals daily: Vitamin C (500 mg), Vitamin E (400 IU), Lutein (10 mg) Zeaxanthin (2 mg), Zinc (80 mg), Copper (2 mg). Your ophthalmologist can tell you if vitamins and minerals are recommended for your dry AMD.

Wet AMD: To help treat wet AMD, there is medication that can be injected into the eye or laser to be done by a Retina Specialist to reduce the number of vessels and slow their leaking.