

## **What is age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and how does it affect my life?**

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a disease associated with aging that gradually destroys sharp, central vision. Central vision is needed for seeing objects clearly and for common daily tasks such as reading and driving, therefore affecting distance, intermediate (computer) and near-point tasks.

AMD affects the macula, the part of the eye that allows you to see fine detail. In some cases, AMD advances so slowly that people notice little change in their vision. In other cases, the disease progresses faster and may lead to a loss of vision in both eyes. AMD is a leading cause of vision loss in Americans 60 years of age and older.

Wet AMD, which accounts for roughly 15 percent of AMD cases, occurs when abnormal blood vessels behind the retina start to grow under the macula. These new blood vessels tend to be very fragile and often leak blood and fluid. With wet AMD, loss of central vision can occur quickly. An early symptom of wet AMD is that straight lines appear wavy. If you notice this condition, contact your eye care professional immediately for a comprehensive dilated eye exam. Treatment options include laser treatment to the affected area, photodynamic therapy and injections to prevent growth of abnormal blood vessels.

Dry AMD, which accounts for about 85 percent of AMD cases, occurs when the light-sensitive cells in the macula slowly break down, gradually blurring central vision in the affected eye. As dry AMD worsens, you may see a blurred spot in the center of your vision. Over time, as less of the macula functions, central vision is gradually lost in the affected eye. The most common symptom of dry AMD is slightly blurred vision. You may have difficulty recognizing faces, or need more light for reading and other tasks. Dry AMD generally affects both eyes, but vision can be lost in one eye while the other eye seems unaffected. It is also not uncommon for both eyes to be affected, though at different levels. There is currently no form of medical treatment for dry AMD. Appropriate diet, recommended anti-oxidants and vitamins, protection from UV rays and refraining from smoking are important lifestyle practices to prevent further progression of AMD.

As a result of AMD, it is not uncommon to have changes in color perception, depth perception (due to the eyes having unequal acuity), difficulty identifying objects of low contrast and a multitude of activities of daily living that may seem nearly impossible.

Low Vision Rehabilitation is paramount to resolving issues that compromise a person's life and may be the only avenue to achieve the capability to perform tasks that were once easy to accomplish. This may include a change in an eyeglasses prescription, stronger reading glasses, or occasional to steady use of magnifiers or video magnification technology (desktop or portable). There are also avenues to continue using computers occupationally or avocationally.

The visual system is one of the most important organ systems of the body and should be treated as such. Just like other organ systems, age is most likely to have an impact. Therefore, persons with macular degeneration should seek comprehensive low vision rehabilitation by an interdisciplinary team to reach the goals that they have to continue activities that are valuable to their quality of life.