

MACULAR DEGENERATION

What is Macular Degeneration ?

Macular Degeneration is a disease of the eye, which is brought about by normal, age-related changes that occur in a structure of the eye called the retina. The retina is a very delicate tissue, located in the back of your eye. It acts in much the same way as does the film inside of a camera. The retina records the images that enable you to see. Macular Degeneration affects a special area of the retina called the macula. The macula is the area of the retina that is responsible for your vision straight ahead, and your color vision, but not for your side, or peripheral vision.

With Macular Degeneration, your vision becomes blurry because the macula is thinning or "wearing out" due to age.

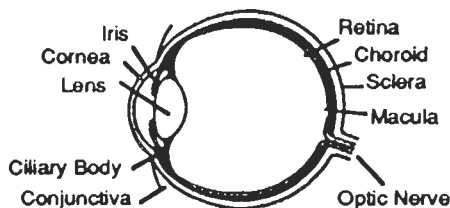
What are symptoms of Macular Degeneration ?

Symptoms depend on the severity of the condition. When Macular Degeneration is beginning, you will notice that your vision is becoming blurry, or distorted. You may notice that it is increasingly difficult to read small print. In some cases, gray images, or even blank areas appear when looking straight ahead.

Also, colors may begin to look duller with Macular Degeneration. However, your side, or peripheral vision is never affected with this condition.

Who develops Macular Degeneration ?

Almost all of us will develop Macular Degeneration to some degree as we age. However, there are different types of Macular Degeneration, or stages of the disease, which can cause different amounts of visual loss.



The Human Eye

What are the different types of Macular Degeneration ?

The first type is called **Dry, or Atrophic Macular Degeneration**. This is the type that affects most people as they age. With Atrophic Macular Degeneration, the macula will shrink, or thin, causing only slightly blurred vision, especially while reading small print.

The second type of Macular Degeneration is much more serious. It is called **Exudative Macular Degeneration**. This condition occurs when tiny blood vessels begin to grow into the aging, and thinning macular area. These blood vessels are fragile, and can easily break, or leak. When this happens, there will be a build-up of fluid, blood, and scar tissue around the macula. Vision can become very distorted, and in severe cases, central vision is lost.

□ *A vision test, called the Amsler Grid, should be performed daily to monitor subtle changes in your vision.*

What is the treatment for Macular Degeneration ?

Recent studies are suggesting that certain vitamins, and minerals, can slow down the process of Macular Degeneration. Also, glasses that block out the blue end of the light spectrum (the UltraViolet Rays) may help slow down the age-related changes in the macula, and enhance your sight.

Treatment for Exudative Macular Degeneration, the most serious stage of the disease, usually involves painless laser surgery. Laser treatment can seal off leaking blood vessels, and keep damage at the macula to a minimum.

However, there is no "cure" for Macular Degeneration. It is part of the normal aging process. All of the present treatment methods are aimed at slowing down, or preventing, excessive vision loss while the disease is still in the early stages.

When should treatment begin ?

Early treatment is important to prevent excessive loss of vision. Therefore, once Macular Degeneration has been diagnosed, you must monitor your vision to detect any changes in the macula. A test called an **Amsler Grid** will enable you to detect any subtle changes in your vision due to weakening of the macula.

Can vision be enhanced if loss of sight occurs ?

If your vision loss prevents you from reading, or enjoying other activities, special optical aids, called **Low Vision Devices**, are available to enhance your vision enough for you to perform the tasks that you desire.