

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Loss of Central Vision

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is an eye disease that is the leading cause of vision loss in people age 65 and over in the U.S.

This painless condition occurs when the macula in the eye begins to break down. The macula is located in the middle of the retina. It consists of millions of light-sensing cells that help produce sharp, central vision. Central vision is important for seeing clearly and for doing routine tasks such as reading and driving.

For some people, the disease advances slowly and has little effect on vision. For others, the disease develops faster and may lead to vision loss in one or both eyes. In AMD, only the central vision is affected. Side (peripheral) vision is not affected.

The cause of AMD is not known.

Types of AMD

There are two types of age-related macular degeneration:

- **dry AMD** — If part of the retina becomes diseased, macula cells start to break down. This can lead to a slow loss of central vision.

This type occurs in 90 percent of people with AMD.

- **wet AMD** — If dry AMD gets worse, new blood vessels may grow and cause wet AMD. The blood vessels are often weak and leak blood and fluid under the macula.

This can damage the macula in a short time, causing loss of vision.

This type of AMD occurs in only 10 percent of the people with AMD, but accounts for 90 percent of blindness due to AMD.

Those at Risk for AMD

Adults older than age 60 are at risk for AMD. You are more at risk if you:

- have a family history of macular degeneration
- are female
- are Caucasian
- smoke.

Signs of AMD

These signs may be in one or both eyes:

- seeing a dark or empty area in the center of your vision
- having blurry central vision (words in a book are blurry) that goes away with bright light
- seeing straight lines as crooked lines (lines in a graph or chart).

Finding and Treating AMD

Your eye care provider can tell if you have macular degeneration during an eye exam. During the exam, he or she may test your color vision, have you look at a graph or grid and look at your retina and macula.

Dry AMD cannot be treated. The Macular Degeneration Foundation suggests eating a low-fat, low cholesterol diet, not smoking and getting enough vitamin E, C and lutein every day.

Wet AMD can be treated with laser surgery. The laser beam will destroy new, weak blood vessels to prevent them from leaking onto the macula. This laser procedure can be done in an eye clinic.

Information adapted from the National Eye Institute of the National Institutes of Health.