

AGE RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD, ARMD)



Dr. Julie Thums

Macular degeneration, often called AMD or ARMD (age-related macular degeneration), is the leading cause of vision loss and blindness in Americans aged 65 and older. “Baby Boomers” (those born between 1946-1964) are forming an increasingly larger percentage of the general population. Therefore, the number of people with AMD is expected to increase over time.

What is macular degeneration?

Macular degeneration is a condition in which the eye's macula changes over time. The macula is the part of the retina responsible for detailed central vision. As the macula changes it causes a gradual or sudden loss of central vision. Macular degeneration is classified as either dry or wet. About 90% of patients with AMD have the dry form of the disease. It is characterized by changes in a few of the retinal layers in the macula. In the wet form, new blood vessels grow beneath the retina and leak blood and fluid. This leakage causes retinal cells to die and creates blind spots in central vision.

Who's at the most risk for macular degeneration?

The highest risk factor for AMD is age. Females and whites are at slightly higher risk. There is a higher risk for macular degeneration if there is a strong family history of the disease. Evidence also suggests that smoking is a risk factor for macular degeneration. Some researchers believe that over-exposure to sunlight also may be a contributing factor in development of macular degeneration, but this theory has not been proven conclusively.

What are the symptoms of macular degeneration?

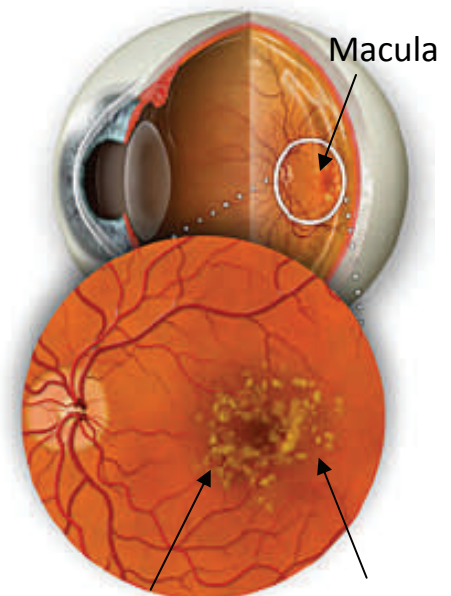
Macular degeneration produces a slow, painless vision loss. With the wet form of macular degeneration the vision changes sometimes happen sudden. Early symptoms of vision loss from AMD include shadowy areas in the central vision or unusually fuzzy or distorted vision. Your eye doctor may find signs of AMD before you have any symptoms, so regular eye exams can mean early diagnosis.

How is macular degeneration diagnosed?

Macular degeneration is diagnosed during a dilated eye examination. There are exciting new instruments that also aid in diagnosing and monitoring patients with AMD. Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) uses a laser to measure the macular thickness and checks if the retinal layers are compromised.

How is macular degeneration treated?

For certain forms of dry AMD, I recommend antioxidant supplements that may slow its progression. There are exciting new treatments for the wet form of macular degeneration involving laser treatments or injectable medications. Early diagnosis is the key.



Macular Degeneration

Dr. Julie Thums is an optometrist at HealthView Eye Care Center-Medford. For more information on Macular Degeneration, you can contact her at (715)748-2020 or 866-748-2020.