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University Hospitals Dorset
NHS Foundation Trust

Age-related Macular Degeneration

The Eye Unit




Information and advice for patients about
Age-related Macular Degeneration

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What is Macular Degeneration?

Macular degeneration is the most common cause of visual impairment in the developed world today.

It affects the macula, which is a small part of the retina at the back of the eye. The macula is responsible for the central vision we use to read and see people's faces.

It most commonly affects people over the age of 60 and is therefore known as Age Related Macular Degeneration, or AMD.

“Wet” and “Dry” Macular Degeneration

There are two types of AMD. These are known as wet and dry macular degeneration. It helps to picture the retina as being like a carpet. In dry macular degeneration, the carpet is worn thin, with some holes. In wet macular degeneration, the carpet is thin with leaky water pipes under the floorboards.

- e) The Eye Unit run low vision events at regular intervals, providing support and information to the public and patients. Look on notice boards for the dates of the next meeting.

Useful Contacts

Dorset Blind Association,

17 Bournemouth Road, Lower Parkstone,
Poole BH14 OEF

Telephone: 01202 712865

Bournemouth Blind Society,

5 Victoria Park Road, Bournemouth BH9 2RB

Telephone: 01202 546644

email: info@bournemouthblindsociety.uk

The Macular Disease Society,

PO Box 1870, Andover, Hampshire SP10 9AD

Helpline: 0845 241 2041

Website: www.MacularDisease.org

5 Diet

Diet is very important, especially if AMD has been diagnosed in one eye already. In general, a diet low in saturated fats and with plenty of fruit and leafy green vegetables is advised. Certain vitamins may help.

How is AMD diagnosed?

After examination by the eye doctor, some tests may be performed to reach a diagnosis of AMD. A dye test known as a “fluorescein angiogram” is usually carried out, with different types of photographs to diagnose the condition. Examples of the type of photographs which may be taken are shown on page 5.

Obesity not only increases the risk of developing AMD but can also speed the progression of the disease.

You can obtain healthy eating advice leaflets in the Eye Unit.

Help yourself to see better:

- a) Use good lighting, as bright as possible, that you can adjust for each task or activity you do.
- b) Magnifiers can help you see dials on cookers, food labels, television, letters, books/newspapers. These can be small, such as pocket-sized, can be mounted onto spectacles, or can be similar to a camera which you hold over the page you are reading. Local low vision services can provide NHS magnifiers and offer advice on making the most of the vision you still have. Please see our contacts list at the back of this leaflet for low vision services in this area.

- c) Do you find bright lights or sunlight causes glare? If so, you may find “yellow lenses” helpful - these can be obtained from your local opticians.
- d) Use your local support groups. See our list of contacts for helpful organisations in this area; the Dorset Blind Association offer practical help and advice, and also run social groups.

The Bournemouth Blind Society also offers an excellent choice of social activities and events, as well as support and information for the visually impaired.

Remember also the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). They are an excellent source of advice, information and help, and run support groups and a befriending service over the telephone.

This can create a “blister” or “lump” of fluid. This collection of fluid can cause a sudden deterioration in vision. In reality these leaky pipes are abnormal blood vessels that grow into the macula and bleed.

What are the risk factors?

- 1 Age**
As you get older you are more likely to develop AMD. This is because the body’s cells don’t renew as quickly when you get older.
- 2 Smoking**
If you smoke you are 3 times more likely to get AMD.
- 3 High blood pressure**
If your blood pressure is high you are more at risk.
- 4 Genetics**
A family history of AMD increases the possibility of developing the condition.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I be suitable for treatment?

Not everyone with AMD will benefit from treatment. This is because the treatment works only when the disease is active, for example if blood vessels around the macula are leaking. However, if scar tissue has formed due to old disease, this will not respond to treatment.

Your eye doctor can discuss this with you, and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Will I go blind?

Although the central or “reading” vision may be lost, macular degeneration is not a blinding condition. “Peripheral” vision will remain unaffected by AMD.

Will I be registered partially sighted or blind, and what does this mean?

If you are having problems with your vision, your optician or GP can refer you to an Eye Unit. The eye doctor will assess if you qualify for registration as “sight impaired” or “severely sight impaired”.

Registration entitles you to help from social services, and possibly some benefits which the sight and hearing team will discuss with you.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, Wendy Wade, can provide you with information and support, as well as help and advice on sight loss registration and many other sight loss support organisations

What is CHARLES BONNET syndrome?

This syndrome causes patients with visual loss to see patterns, objects & even faces, and other figures which are not really there.

These symptoms are perfectly normal and can occur in any patients who suffer significant visual loss. However some patients can find these images worrying or even frightening. It is important to know that these images or patterns are NOT associated with mental illness. It was first described by Charles Bonnet in 1769 when his grandfather, nearly blinded by cataracts, described seeing patterns & people. If you feel anxious about any of these symptoms, speak to your doctor or one of the nursing staff in the Eye Unit.

Top Tips

Stop Smoking;

The link between smoking and developing AMD is the same risk associated with smoking and lung cancer. Speak to your GP about giving up.

Eat healthily:

Fresh fruit and green leafy vegetables daily may help protect against AMD.



How is AMD treated?

Treatment is available for the wet type of AMD, and some patients will benefit from this treatment more than others. The eye doctor who examines you will discuss treatment options with you and decide on the best treatment available. Don't be afraid to ask any questions you may have.