

AGE RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

What is AMD?

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a condition that affects the macula – an area at the back of your eye which is responsible for your central vision. Typically, this condition affects people later in life, affecting up to 1 in 10 people aged 65 or over. The condition causes the macula to become damaged, which can affect your ability to do certain tasks such as reading, driving, or watching television. Macular degeneration is the leading cause of sight loss in the UK. However, it does not lead to total blindness because it does not affect your peripheral vision.

AMD can be classified into two different types – ‘Dry’ or ‘Wet’. Dry AMD is caused by a build up of yellow deposits, drusen, at the macula. Dry

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AMD in its early stages can have little effect on the vision but can slowly progress over time into late stage 'geographic atrophy' which causes your retina to thin. Wet AMD is caused by the growth of abnormal blood vessels behind the macula which leak fluid and cause a rapid loss of vision. It is possible for dry AMD to progress into the wet type.

What are the symptoms of AMD?

The most common symptom of AMD is having difficulty reading, even with your correct reading prescription glasses. Some people notice vision is blurred or distorted, which is when straight lines appear wavy. As the condition advances, you may notice a smudge in the middle of your vision. AMD can affect one eye or both, so it is a good idea to regularly

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check your vision in each eye by covering one eye at a time when reading or watching television. Doing this helps you to notice any changes early. As always, if you notice any changes in your vision, contact your optometrist as soon as possible.

Other symptoms include:

- ❖ Objects looking smaller than normal
- ❖ Becoming sensitive to light
- ❖ Difficulties adapting when going from dark to light environments
- ❖ Colours seeming to be less bright or faded
- ❖ Seeing things that are not there

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Are there any risk factors for developing AMD?

As the name suggests, age is the number one risk factor. You are also more at risk of developing AMD if a member of your family has the condition. The main modifiable risk factor is smoking so if you are a smoker it is recommended to stop. Other modifiable risk factors include obesity, high blood pressure and diets that are high in fat. Eating green, leafy vegetables (such as spinach, kale, broccoli) may reduce your risk of developing AMD. There is also an association between prolonged UV exposure and AMD, therefore it is recommended that you wear sunglasses when you are outdoors for long periods.



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How is AMD diagnosed?

This condition can be diagnosed by your optometrist by looking at the back of your eye. The best way to detect eye conditions as early as possible is to attend regular eye exams and to contact your optometrist as soon as possible if you notice any changes with your eyes or vision.

Can AMD be treated?

The treatment of AMD depends on the type of macular degeneration and the extent. There is currently no treatment available for the dry type. However, there are visual aids that can help if the AMD is affecting your ability to see. Your optometrist can advise you on devices such as magnifiers or mobile apps that can help you. Ensuring you have good lighting is very

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important. There are local low-vision services and specialist organisations who can provide you with equipment to help you manage around the house and with daily activities.

Wet AMD can often be treated if caught early enough. This is done by giving you an injection directly into the eye and is often repeated every few weeks for a few months or as long as is necessary. This treatment can stop the condition from progressing and therefore prevent the vision from getting any worse. If your optometrist suspects you have wet AMD you will be referred to the hospital eye service where it will be decided if you need treatment.

There is some evidence that taking certain dietary supplements, which are available to purchase, can help to delay the progression of



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AMD in some people. However, the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) does not feel there is enough clinical evidence to recommend this as a treatment for AMD. You may wish to discuss this further with your optometrist to decide whether or not they may be helpful for you and to make sure the ingredients are suitable for you.