

How's your Macula?

MACULAR DEGENERATION IS the leading cause of blindness and severe vision impairment in Australia. Every year over ten thousand people are diagnosed with macular degeneration. One in seven people over 50 years of age are affected by the disease and its incidence increases with age.

What is Macular Degeneration?

Macular Degeneration (AMD) is a degenerative disease of the retina which causes progressive, painless loss of vision affecting the ability to see fine details, drive, read and recognize faces. The changes to the retina from Macular Degeneration can be easily seen and monitored with photographs of the retina.

How does Macular Degeneration affect vision?

Macular Degeneration creates a defect in your central vision, which appears as a black or distorted spot. This black or distorted spot remains in your line of sight wherever you look or focus. Thus, small details become difficult to distinguish. Straight lines will also appear distorted or wavy. Your overall vision becomes blurry and your colour vision is also affected.

An excellent way to monitor the changes to your central vision from Macular Degeneration is by checking an Amsler Grid frequently. This will be given to you by your optometrist or eye specialist with instructions. Any sudden changes to the appearance of the Amsler Grid means a corresponding change has occurred in the back of the eye and warrants immediate examination by your eye care practitioner.

What are the Risk Factors?

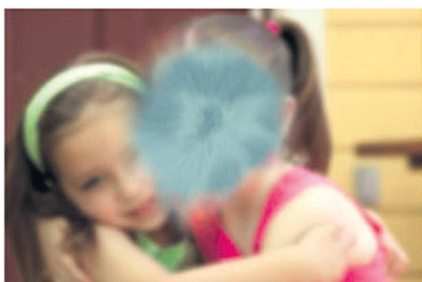
- Age – risk of macular degeneration increases with age. One in three people over 75 years are affected.
- Sex – females are more likely to develop macular degeneration than males.
- Smoking – proven to increase the risk of macular degeneration by 3-4 times. The risk may also be higher in heavy smokers or those who have smoked for many years.
- Family History – those with a family history have a 50% chance of developing AMD.
- Light Exposure – UV and blue light (main source is from the sun) may cause macular degeneration.
- Light Skin and Eye Colour – those with blue-grey or green eyes may be more likely to develop macular degeneration than those with brown eyes.
- High Blood Pressure
- High Cholesterol
- Diet – not getting enough of certain vitamins and antioxidants. Recent data indicates that vegetable oils which are hidden in a lot of processed foods and margarine contribute to the risk of developing macular degeneration. These results however, and not been proven conclusively.

What can reduce my Risk?

- Quit smoking – as well as increasing chances of developing macular degeneration, studies indicate that smokers develop



Normal Vision



Macular Degeneration

macular degeneration ten years before non-smokers.

- Wear sunglasses when outdoors during the day.
- Change your diet to a balanced one with an emphasis on a variety of fresh fruits and brightly coloured vegetables high in antioxidants and vitamins. These foods include citrus fruits, capsicum, tomatoes, nuts, dark green leafy vegetables, tea and wholegrains. Oils other than olive oil should be avoided. Increasing your intake of essential fatty acids, present in fish and seeds/nuts are shown to have a protective effect against macular degeneration.
- Supplement your diet with anti-oxidants, zinc and lutein eg. Macu-Vision or Lutein Vision. However, consultation with your medical practitioner is recommended before taking any supplements as they may interact with your current medications. Some vitamins are also hazardous for smokers.

Macular Degeneration has also been shown to impact your general health. The latest research studies have indicated that those with macular degeneration are up to 60 percent more likely to develop coronary heart disease than those without the disease.

There is no cure for Macular Degeneration. Current treatments aim to slow down progression of the disease and to preserve the present level of sight. Therefore, prevention of macular degeneration by changing your lifestyle and diet is the best way to preserve your sight. Regular eye examinations by an optometrist or ophthalmologist (eye specialist) are recommended to monitor to your vision and check for macular degeneration.

Dianne Andrews

Dianne Andrews is the optometrist and proprietor of Menai Eye Care. Winner Menai District Business Awards 2003, 2004 & 2005- Health Care. Finalist 2006, 2007 & 2008, Runner-up 2009. WINNER Leader Business Awards 2008 – Professional Medical Services, Finalist 2009.