



What is it?

Macular degeneration (MD) is also referred to as 'age-related macular degeneration' because the condition tends to develop as you age. It is a chronic eye disease that involves deterioration of the macular.

The 'macula' is a small area in the retina at the back of your eye and is responsible for central vision. You need a healthy macula for normal central vision acuity. It consists of light-sensitive cells called cones and rods. The cones are responsible for colour vision, and the rods enable you to see shades of grey.

The cones and rods receive nutrients from an underlying layer of blood vessels called the choroid.

The retinal pigment epithelium (RPE) is a layer of tissue forming the outermost surface of the retina. Its main role is to provide a route for nutrients from the choroid to the retina and helps remove waste products from the retina to the choroid.

Macular degeneration doesn't cause total blindness. It only affects your central vision and not your peripheral vision. MD can still affect your quality of life because good central vision is essential for reading, driving or doing any detail work.

There are two types of MD:

Dry MD – most of the time MD starts out as the dry form. Initially only one eye may be affected and eventually both eyes become involved

Wet MD – accounts for 10-15 % of all cases which started out as the dry form. Usually if you have wet MD in one eye the other eye will also develop the disease.

Symptoms

MD usually develops slowly and painlessly and the signs and symptoms vary depending whether you have wet or dry MD.



Dry macular degeneration signs and symptoms:

- The light seems too dull. You need a bright light when reading or doing close work
- You eyes find it difficult to adapt to rooms with dim lighting
- You're not even drunk and printed words appear blurry
- Watch what you hang or paint on your walls because colours appear less bright
- You are not being a snob – you really have difficulty recognising faces
- You're not having a 60's flashback. You are experiencing gradual haziness of your overall vision
- You keep getting pulled up by others for staring. You may notice a blind spot in the centre of your visual field which affects your overall central vision acuity. To get a complete image of an object you need to do a full scan, not just a glance.

Wet MD signs and symptoms are similar dry MD but may progress faster and also include the following:

- Visual deformations, such as straight lines appearing wavy or crooked
- Objects appearing smaller or farther away than should be.

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Why it happens?

Dry MD -

As you age, the RPE may deteriorate, lose its pigment and become thin causing the nutritional and waste-removing cycles between the retina and the choroid to come to a halt.

Wow your eyes were very busy and you didn't even realise it!! Very soon waste deposits accumulate; your rods and cones lack nutrients and get damaged and degenerate.

This is when the first symptom of dry MD develops – your vision becomes blurred.

Wet MD.

It results when abnormal blood vessels form underneath the retina at the back of the eye. These new blood vessels leak fluid or blood and blur central vision. Vision loss may be rapid and severe.

Factors that may increase the risk of MD include:

- Age – over 60
- Genetic tendency
- Obesity
- Light coloured eyes
- Sunlight exposure
- Cardiovascular disease
- Cigarette smoking
- Nutritional deficiencies.

What natural therapies can help?

Bilberry – clinical studies involving healthy people found that bilberry had improvements in night vision and visual sharpness. This was tested by flashing a bright light in front of their eyes and assessing how fast their eyes adjusted, while taking bilberry.

Zinc, selenium, vitamin A, vitamin C and **vitamin E** are anti-oxidants and help reduce free radical damage to the eye. Zinc is normally found in high quantities in our eyes.

Studies reveal that supplementing with zinc, **beta carotene** and vitamins C and E may slow down the progression of AMD.

In addition studies found a reduced risk of 27% for visual acuity loss and 25% for progression of AMD in patients with advanced AMD, taking vitamin E.

Fish oil – eating fish more than once a week is linked to a reduced risk of developing age-related macular degeneration.

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Did you know?

Get your eyes checked regularly. Early detection can help reduce further damage.

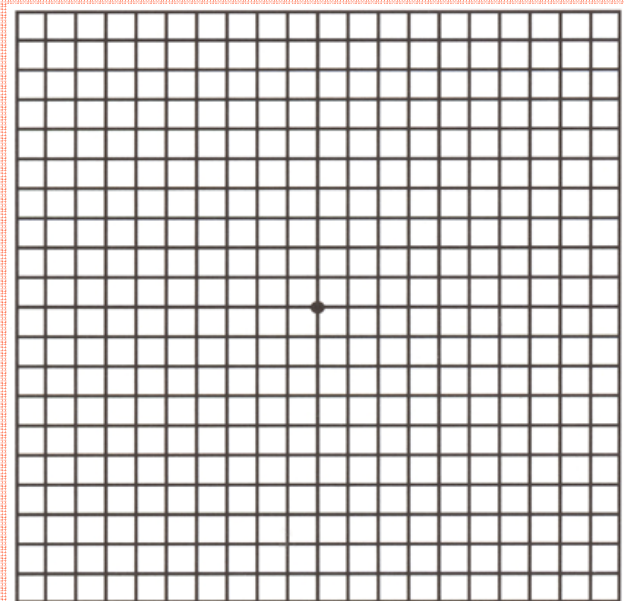
The Amsler grid is a good way to monitor if there are any signs of MD.

Hold the grid 30cm in front, wearing your glasses if you normally wear them

Cover one eye and look directly at the dot in the middle with your uncovered eye. Take note see if all of the lines of the grid are straight, are complete and have the same contrast.

Repeat the above steps with your other eye.

The lines should not be wavy, blurred or dark and if they are see your eye specialist.

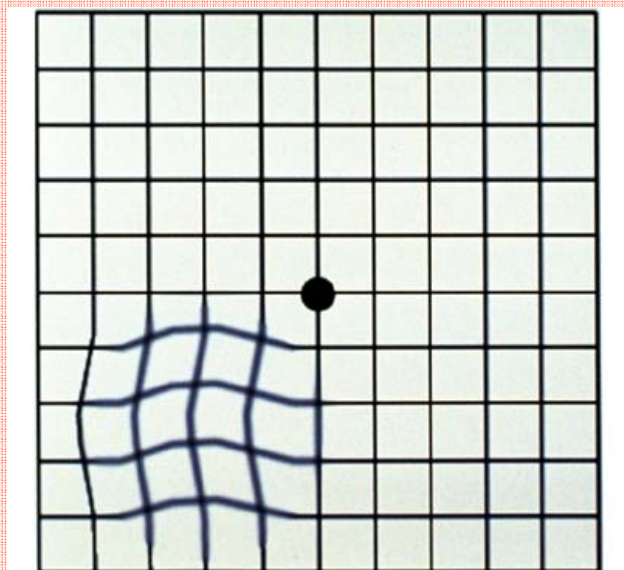


This is what the lines should not look like.

Invest in a good pair of sunglasses that filter out UVA and UVB rays.

Include foods rich in anti-oxidants such as fruit and vegetables such as berries and yellow/red vegetables.

Cigarette smoking not only increases your risk of cardiovascular disease but also MD. Speak to your healthcare professional about ways to reduce smoking.



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