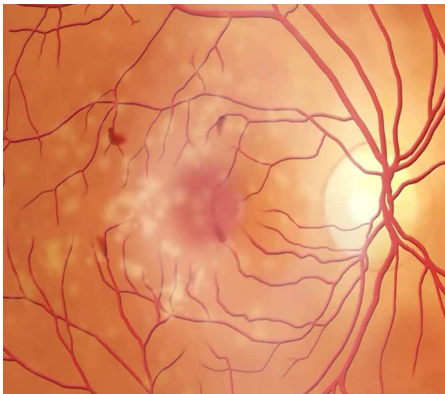


AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD)

Q What is macular degeneration?

A The macular is a small area in the centre of the retina (the light sensitive layer at the back of the eye). The macular is a very important part of the retina as it is the area that we use to see small detail, for example, reading, seeing the television, recognizing faces etc. Macular degeneration is a painless condition that affects the macular causing progressive loss of central vision.



Macular degeneration is the most common reason for people in the UK to be registered blind, though total blindness almost never occurs from this condition, but you are likely to find it difficult to read, to recognize people or to drive. However, the area surrounding the macula is not affected so peripheral vision remains clear and you can usually still move around fairly freely.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (ARMD) is the most common form of macular degeneration (there are some rare forms that affect younger people). As the name suggests, it is more likely to occur as you get older and is more common in females. Other risk factors include family history and smoking.



There are two types of ARMD, usually referred to as 'wet' and 'dry'. Only about 10% of people have wet macular degeneration. In dry ARMD the condition develops very slowly causing gradual loss of central vision. Wet ARMD results in a build-up of fluid under the retina and can result in a more sudden and severe loss of vision.

Q What are the symptoms of macular degeneration?

A In the early stages of macula degeneration you may have some difficulty in reading, watching television, and recognizing faces. You may see the outline of a face but not the features. There may be some distortion of vision so that objects appear larger or smaller than normal or straight lines appear wavy, so judging distances and heights may become difficult. You may become very sensitive to light or you may see colours or lights that are not there. The condition is not painful.

In the later stages you may lose your central vision altogether which makes reading and recognising faces etc. extremely difficult. However, the condition does not affect your peripheral vision so you should still manage to get around unaided.

'Dry' ARMD progresses slowly over a number of years whereas 'wet' ARMD progresses much more rapidly, over weeks or months.

Q How do I know if I have macular degeneration?

A If you have noticed a deterioration in your vision you should have an eye examination. Your optometrist

will check your vision and look at the back of your eye. If you have dry ARMD your optometrist may be able to help by providing stronger spectacles or a low vision aid such as a magnifier. If you have wet ARMD your optometrist will probably refer you to see an ophthalmologist to consider treatment.

Q What treatment is available?

A Currently there are no medical treatments for dry ARMD. However, there is some evidence that taking vitamin supplements slows down the progression of the condition. Your optometrist will also be able to help you make the most of your vision with spectacles, low vision aids and advice about appropriate lighting etc.

A number of medical treatments are now available to treat wet ARMD. These are designed to prevent the development of new leaky blood vessels at the back of the eye. Their main aim is to stop further progression of the condition but in some cases they have been shown to restore vision to some extent.