



By Julie Newport
OPTOMETRIST

64 Macgregor Terrace
Bardon 4065
3368 3644

Macular Degeneration

Reducing Your Risks

Macular degeneration is an extremely common eye disease, and a big problem for the community.

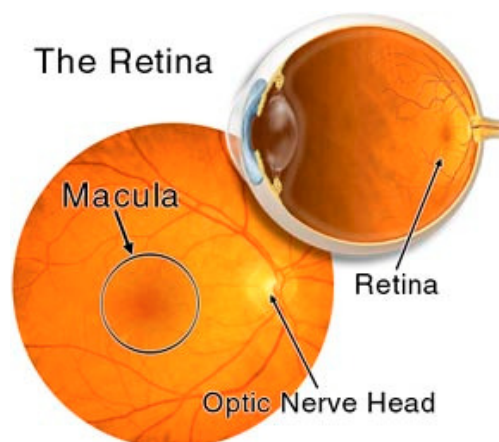
Also known as Age Related Macular Degeneration, it's more common in older people. While approximately 2% of people over 50 years of age have macular degeneration, it strikes 28% of those over 80.

Because more people are living well past their 70s now, this will continue to represent a growing number of people in our community.

Research is continually being directed towards this often debilitating disease, and fortunately we now know some of the ways that can help to reduce the risks of central vision loss through macular degeneration.

What is Macular Degeneration?

The macula is the area of the retina (the nerve layer at the back of your eye that receives images of what we look at) which controls your *central* vision.



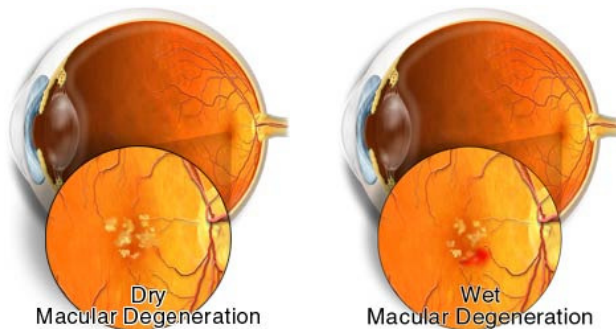
Central vision is what you use when you read a letter chart while having your eyes tested. It's what you use when you read a book, watch the TV, read number plates while driving, and observe faces during conversations. Whenever you're looking directly *at* something, you're using your macula.

In macular degeneration, scars form ("drusen") at the macula; these scars cause disruption to the central vision. For many people with macular degeneration, this may be similar to how you might imagine wearing glasses made of bubble wrap – clear patches here and there but blotchy in between.

The condition is often progressive, and many patients find that their ability to function normally is substantially affected. Because the macula controls central vision, macular degeneration means that for many patients, they can no longer drive, read or even see their meals properly. In fact all daily activities can be affected, and for elderly people, their risk of suffering a fall increases as well.

Broadly, there are two forms of macular degeneration: dry and wet.

In the “dry” form, scarring gradually worsens over time. There is no effective treatment for this form.



In “wet” macular degeneration, membranes form at the macula - these can bleed and can cause rapid changes to vision. Many treatments are now available for “wet” macular degeneration, and early diagnosis is essential.

What Causes It?

Until recently, we’ve had very little idea as to what may cause macular degeneration. There is still a lot of research in the works, but some clues have emerged.

We think that many or all of these factors may be involved in the development of macular degeneration:

- Genetics
- Sunlight
- Diet
- Smoking
- Exercise

There’s not a lot you can do about your genetics, but forewarned is at least forearmed. If you have any family members who have been diagnosed with macular degeneration, now is the time to think about how you can reduce those risk factors where you *do* have some control.

WEAR SUNGLASSES

Most sunglasses purchased in Australia will have excellent UV protection. If in doubt when purchasing, check for an Australian Standards label. Try to get yourself addicted to your sunglasses.



EAT WELL

The better your diet, the lower the risk for **MANY** diseases, including those affecting the eyes.

Remember those 5 veges and 2 fruits we're all supposed to eat every day? Do it! Make sure you aim for lots of

- Vitamin A (carrots!)
- Vitamin C (citrus)
- Vitamin E (wheat germ, olive oil)
- Zinc (oysters, pumpkin seeds)

Other foods that may be very helpful are those containing 2 nutrients usually found together: lutein and zeaxanthin. These are found in abundance in a healthy macula and seem to have a protective role against macular degeneration. Foods which contain lutein and zeaxanthin include:

- Corn
- Egg Yolks
- Kiwi Fruit
- Green leafy veges (broccoli, spinach)
- Peas
- Beans
- Honeydew melon

You can take all these nutrients in supplement form (Macu-Vision – available at your pharmacy - contains vitamins A, C & E and zinc) if you choose, but many health professionals would suggest that you're better off simply adopting a healthy diet.

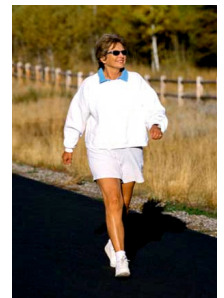
GIVE UP THE SMOKES

Cigarette smoking increases the risk of macular degeneration by **SIX TIMES**.



GET SOME EXERCISE

Some research is suggesting that some people may *eat* all the right things, but their cardiovascular systems are sluggish – they fail to *deliver* the nutrients efficiently. Remember that half-hour of walking (or equivalent) that we're all supposed to do every day? Start now!



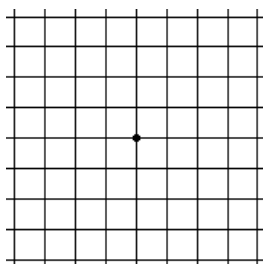
Another consideration here is that fat stores on our bodies can act as sponges for some nutrients – again meaning you might be eating the right stuff, but it's just not reaching your eyes. If you can stand to lose a few kilos, do it!

Omega 3

Fish oil and flaxseed oil are becoming the cure-all of the 21st century. They appear to have benefits in many areas of health, including better concentration, better moods, skin tone, blood flow, and improvement to dry eyes and inflamed joints.

It now appears that they may have a role to play in the prevention of macular degeneration. It's a bit early to say definitively whether they are helpful, and research is ongoing.

MONITORING



If you've been advised that you have signs that may indicate macular degeneration, you can self-monitor at home to check for any progression.

This involves observing a simple grid pattern, once weekly, with one eye at a time. If the grid ever appears distorted or has "bits missing", this can indicate changes at your macula and should be assessed immediately. These "Amsler grids" are available at no charge at ICU, and come with a magnet so they can be adhered to your fridge for ease of use.

Remember an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure – nothing we can advise will completely eliminate your risk, but if you're a candidate for macular degeneration, your best defence against permanent loss of sight is to look after yourself well and monitor your sight regularly.

If you ever have any questions or concerns, you can call us at any time on 3368 3644.