

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MACULAR DEGENERATION

At every stage of life, it's important to protect the health of your eyes and the quality of your vision. However, as you get older the risk of age-related changes and conditions that can impair your eyesight increases. Although the need for reading glasses beginning in middle age is a normal fact of life for most people, there are other types of vision changes that may be indicative of far more serious conditions.

One of the leading causes of blindness among seniors is a disease called macular degeneration.

According to the National Eye Institute, over two million adults in the United States have age-related macular degeneration, and that number is expected to double within the next thirty years.

Macular degeneration is a progressive disease that affects the cells in the back part of your eye, which allows you to visualize objects that are straight ahead. Over time it damages your capacity for sharp, central vision. With macular degeneration, it becomes increasingly more difficult to perform daily tasks such as reading or writing as well as recognizing faces or colors. Among the early signs of vision loss from macular degeneration, are shadowy areas in your central vision and unusually fuzzy or distorted vision. While individuals with advanced cases of macular degeneration are considered legally blind as the result of a profound loss of central vision, their peripheral vision, which is less clear than central vision, is retained.



Seeing your optometrist is essential to protecting the health of your eyes and the quality of your vision.

Because most people do not experience vision loss in the early stage of age-related macular degeneration and the progression can be slow and painless, regular vision care is very important. If you have a family history of eye disease or any other medical conditions that put you at an increased risk, your optometrist will prescribe an appropriate schedule of periodic eye examinations and vision screenings to protect and preserve your sight. In the absence of any known risk factors, it is recommended that beginning at the age of 40, when early signs of eye disease may start to occur, you receive a baseline assessment of your eye health. Your optometrist can often detect early signs of macular degeneration before you begin to experience any symptoms.

Although the exact causes of age-related macular degeneration remain unknown, it is believed that both genetic and environmental factors play a role in its development. There is evidence to suggest that along with aging, obesity, inactivity, high blood pressure, smoking, lighter eye color and the side effects of certain drugs can increase the risk for this condition. While your best natural defenses against age-related vision loss are a nutritious diet and a healthy lifestyle, regular comprehensive eye exams are essential to protect the health of your eyes and the quality of your vision.

At present, there is no known cure for macular degeneration. However, with the help of your optometrist, there are things that you can do to decrease your risk of the disease and to slow its progression. The good news is that with ongoing research into the causes and treatment of macular degeneration, there is hope on the horizon for breakthroughs in more effective methods of treatment as well as finding a cure.

