



# EYE APPEAL OPTOMETRY

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## Macular Degeneration

The macula is the central area of the retina, the thin tissue-like film lining the back of the eye. The retina contains the photoreceptor cells, which provide vision. While the macula is a very tiny area, it is extremely important as it provides all the keen, detailed vision in our direct line of sight.

The larger and more advanced the degeneration of the macula, the worse our detailed vision and the larger the central blurred or blank area becomes. People do not become completely “blind” from macular degeneration, as peripheral vision remains and allows the majority of people with this disorder to maintain their orientation, mobility and independence. Advanced macular degeneration requires special telescopic or magnifying lenses for visually demanding tasks such as reading.

Macular degeneration develops differently in each person, so symptoms may vary. But some of the most common symptoms include:

- Mild loss of ability to see small objects and details with some loss of color perception.
- Distorted vision. Objects appear to be the wrong size or shape. Straight lines may appear wavy or crooked.
- A dark, smudged or empty area appears in or near the center of your vision.

There are two basic types of macular degeneration. About 90% of patients have the “dry” type, which consists of a deterioration of the crucial photoreceptor cells and cells that provide their metabolic support.

The other patients have the “wet” type in which abnormal new blood vessels invade the retina, then leak and hemorrhage (bleed) with resultant scarring and destruction. Patients may develop one or both types.

Fortunately, major advances have been made in the detection and treatment of macular degeneration. Certain vitamins and antioxidants have been found to slow the onset and progression of certain stages and types of macular degeneration. Laser treatments and new medications called “anti-VEGF” medications are available to slow or stop the progress of “wet” macular degeneration and, in some instances even regain some vision.

Early detection of macular degeneration is essential to optimize the effect of any treatment. You may be at greater risk for vision loss from macular degeneration with the following risk factors:

- **Advanced age.**
- **Cigarette smoking.** If you smoke, stop. Exposure to cigarette smoke doubles your risk of macular degeneration. It is the single most preventable cause of macular degeneration.
- **Obesity.** Being severely overweight increases the chance that early or intermediate macular degeneration will progress to the more severe form of the disease.
- **Exposure to sunlight.** It's possible that long-term exposure to ultraviolet light may increase your risk of developing macular degeneration. While this exposure has been linked to cataract formation, the association with macular degeneration remains uncertain.
- **Cardiovascular diseases.** These include high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, and coronary artery disease.
- **Family history of macular degeneration**
- **Changes in the retina inside your eyes detected by your eye doctor, which may be present before you are aware of any vision problem.**

Lifestyle can play a role in reducing your risk of developing macular degeneration:

- Eat a healthy diet high in green leafy vegetables and fish.
- Don't smoke
- Maintain normal blood pressure
- Maintain normal body weight
- Exercise.

Sincerely,

Henry T. Oishi, O.D.