

## **March Awareness: Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)**

The leading cause of vision loss and blindness among Americans age 65 and older is Age Related Macular Degeneration. Currently there are about 1.75 million U.S. residents with AMD, and that number is supposed to increase to almost 3 million by 2020. What is Age Related Macular Degeneration? It is degeneration of the central part of the retina called the macula, which is what we need to see in order to read and drive.

Some signs and symptoms of AMD are: blurred/fuzzy vision, shadowy areas in the central part of vision, seeing the wrong shape, color or sizes. AMD is usually a slow and painless process. There are two stages, dry and wet. The dry stage is the most common, and is when the tissues of the macula become thinned. The wet stage is less common but more damaging. This stage occurs when an abnormal blood vessel grows behind the macula, and then begins to hemorrhage and leak forming scar tissue. A few risk factors of AMD are having a family member who has the condition, having high blood pressure, or have lighter colored eyes. Smoking and obesity also fall into the list.

There is currently no known cure for Age Related Macular Degeneration, although regular scheduled yearly eye exams are needed to monitor the progression of the condition. There are specific supplemental anti-oxidant vitamins and minerals to help slow the progression of the dry stage. The essential nutrients for your eyes that should be in your diet are Lutien, DHA, Vitamin C & E, and Zinc. In 2006 the FDA approved a drug called Lucentis that inhibits the abnormal blood vessels in the wet stage. It may show improvements to vision and slow the rate of vision loss. This treatment consists of tiny injections in the eyes once a month for 3 months, with additional months if needed. There are also other drugs similar to Lucentis, such like Eylea, Macugen and Visudyne. Laser treatments and photodynamic therapy are sometimes used to seal the leaking blood vessels, halting the damage and slowing the progression of the wet stage. Sometimes the therapies are used in conjunction with the drugs.

Regular scheduled eye exams are important because they can detect diseases and problems early on. Many problems have no obvious signs or symptoms. Maintaining good vision and eye health may prevent vision loss. During an eye exam there will be a few ocular health tests performed, one which will take the internal pressure of the eye. Knowing the pressure can determine if the patient is at risk for glaucoma. The eyes blood vessels are also examined, and therefore helps monitor diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.