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Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration is the leading cause of central vision loss among older people. It results from changes to the macula, a portion of the retina responsible for clear, sharp vision that is located on the inside back wall of the eye.

The macula is many times more sensitive than the rest of the retina; without a healthy macula, seeing detail or vivid color is not possible.

Macular degeneration has several causes. In one type, the tissue of the macula becomes thin and stops working well. This type is thought to be a part of the natural aging process in some people.

In another, fluids from newly formed blood vessels leak into the eye and cause vision loss. If detected early, this condition can be treated with laser therapy, but early detection and prompt treatment are vital in limiting damage.

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

- A gradual loss of ability to see objects clearly
- Distorted vision; objects appear to be the wrong size or shape, or straight lines appear wavy or crooked
- A gradual loss of clear color vision
- A dark or empty area appearing in the center of vision

These symptoms may also indicate other eye health problems, so if you are experiencing any of these, contact your doctor of optometry immediately.

In a comprehensive eye examination, your doctor will perform a variety of tests to determine if you have macular degeneration or another condition causing your symptoms.

Unfortunately, central vision damaged by macular degeneration cannot be restored. However, because macular degeneration does not damage side vision, low vision aids such as telescopic and microscopic special lenses, magnifying glasses, and electronic magnifiers for close work can be prescribed to help make the most of remaining vision. With adaptation, people with macular degeneration can often cope well and continue to do most things they were accustomed to doing.

Remember: early detection of macular degeneration is the most important factor in determining if you can be treated effectively. Use an Amsler Grid as directed by your optometrist and maintain a regular schedule of optometric examinations to help protect your vision.

