



Forms of Macular Degeneration

There are two forms of age-related macular degeneration (AMD): dry and wet. It is possible for a person to suffer from both forms, for AMD to affect one or both eyes, and for the disease to progress slowly or rapidly. Dry AMD may advance and cause loss of vision without turning into the wet form of the disease. However, it is also possible for early-stage dry AMD to change into the wet form of the disease.

Dry macular degeneration is the most common type of AMD. This form, in which the photosensitive cells of the macula slowly break down, is diagnosed in 85-90 percent of cases. Yellow deposits called drusen (extracellular waste products from metabolism) form and accumulate under the retina between the retinal pigmented epithelium (RPE) layer and the Bruch's membrane, which supports the retina. Drusen are often found in the eyes of older people, but an increase in the size and number of these deposits is frequently the first sign of macular degeneration. Over time, drusen are associated with deterioration of the macula and the death of RPE and photoreceptor cells, resulting in a blurring or spotty loss of clear, straight-ahead vision. The dry form of AMD has three stages:

- **Early AMD** - patients have several small drusen or a few medium-sized drusen. There is no vision loss or symptoms at this stage.
- **Intermediate AMD** - patients have many medium-sized drusen or one or more large drusen. Some people may need more light for tasks such as reading. A blurry spot may appear in the center of the visual field.
- **Advanced AMD** - patients exhibit a large number of drusen deposits and a breakdown of RPE and photoreceptor (light sensitive) cells and supporting tissue in the retina. A large blurry

spot occurs in the center of the visual field and can become larger and darker, eventually causing a complete loss of central vision.

Wet macular degeneration occurs when abnormal blood vessels grow behind the macula as RPE and photoreceptor cells die. The Bruch's membrane begins to break down, usually near drusen deposits, and new blood vessels grow. This growth is called neovascularization. These vessels are very fragile and can leak fluid and blood, resulting in scarring of the macula and the potential for rapid, severe damage. Straight-ahead vision can become distorted or lost entirely in a short period of time, sometimes within days or weeks. Wet macular degeneration accounts for approximately 10 percent of the cases, but it results in 90 percent of the cases of legal blindness. All wet AMD is considered advanced.

Some of the information in this fact sheet was obtained from the National Eye Institute. This information should not in any way substitute for the advice of a qualified healthcare professional and is not intended to constitute medical advice. For further information, contact Macular Degeneration Research, a program of the American Health Assistance Foundation, at 22512 Gateway Center Drive, Clarksburg, Maryland 20871, call 1-800-437-2423, or visit our website at www.ahaf.org.

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