



Marble Valley Eye Care

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Love your eyes: Protect yourself from the leading cause of blindness

by John F. Coco, MD, Marble Valley Eye Care

Seniors are at heightened risk for age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of blindness among older Americans. The disease damages central vision, limiting a person's ability to read and recognize faces. Approximately 2.1 million Americans had AMD as of 2010. This number is expected to double to more than 5.4 million by 2050. Meanwhile, fewer people are aware of the disease compared to other eye diseases such as cataracts and glaucoma.

There are steps you can take to better care for your eyes and protect yourselves from AMD-related blindness.

- Get regular comprehensive eye exams. AMD often has no early warning signs, so getting regular comprehensive eye exams is critical to diagnosing and treating AMD in its early stages. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that people over age 65 get an exam every 1-2 years, even if they have no signs or symptoms of eye problems.
- Quit smoking. Numerous studies have shown smoking to increase risk of developing AMD and the speed at which it progresses. If you smoke, you are twice as likely to develop macular degeneration compared with a nonsmoker.
- Eat a diet rich in omega-3s and low in cholesterol and saturated fat. A number of studies have shown that people who have a reduced risk of AMD had diets rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as fish. In one study of patients who were at moderate risk for AMD progression, those who reported the highest omega-3 intake (not in the form of a supplement) were 30% less likely to develop advanced AMD after 12 years. In another study, an increased risk of AMD was found in individuals who had a higher intake of saturated fats and cholesterol and in those with a higher body mass index.
- Exercise regularly. Many studies have shown that getting regular exercise can benefit your eyes. One study found that exercising 3 times a week reduce the risk of developing wet AMD over 15 years by 70%.
- Know your family's eye health history. If you have a close relative with AMD, you have a 50% chance of developing the condition. Before you go in for your next eye exam, speak with your family about their eye health history. Sharing this information with your eye doctor may prompt him or her to recommend more frequent eye exams. The earlier AMD is caught, the better chances you may have of saving your vision.

You can learn more about age-related macular degeneration on the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeSmart AMD pages. This article cited from the American Academy of Ophthalmology.