

Macular Degeneration

Macular Degeneration Facts

Macular Degeneration (MD) causes of 2/3rds of blindness in Australia, and is a modern health epidemic, which experts predict will triple in the next 25 years. MD is now so common that, at some point in their lives, all Australians will either suffer from it or know someone who does.

MD can affect your vision as early as your 50's, with some cases reported earlier and your risk increases with age. Almost half of all people 75+ are affected. Women are twice as likely to suffer as men. 12,000 new cases of late stage MD are diagnosed each year. An estimated half a million Australians have early signs of retinal damage but because their vision is usually normal, many have no idea of their predicament.

Symptoms of Macular Degeneration

- Central, or detailed vision is blocked by dark or empty spaces
- Straight lines appear distorted or wavy
- Images become blurry
- Colours are hard to distinguish

What is the Macula?

The macula is the tiny central portion of your retina that provides fine detail (central) vision and allows you to perform everyday activities such as reading, watching TV, driving and crossing roads. Over time the macula can deteriorate due to age and exposure to light. Once the macula is damaged, you start to lose your central vision,

Causes and Risks

While the precise cause of MD remains unknown, the following have been identified as risk factors and influences:

- Age
- Sex – women are more likely to develop MD than men
- Smoking (clinically proven to increase your risk of MD by 3 to 4 times)
- Genetics (family history of MD)
- Light exposure
- Light skin and eye colour (those with blue, grey or green eyes are more likely to develop MD than those with brown iris colour)
- Diet – not getting enough of certain vitamins, minerals and antioxidants

Research on Supplementation and MD

The Age Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), conducted by the US National Eye Institute, involved over 4,600 people for an average of 6.3 years and showed that high levels of antioxidants and zinc:

- Reduced the risk of developing advanced MD by about 25%
- Reduced the risk of vision loss by 19%

The antioxidant formula used in the study included zinc, copper, vitamin C, vitamin E and betacarotene. Most Australians don't get nearly enough zinc. Almost a third of Australian men 55-65 don't get their recommended daily intake (RDI) of zinc. The figures for women are even more disturbing:

- 90% of women 45+ do not get their RDI for zinc
- 95% of women 65+ do not get their RDI for zinc

Preventative Measures

- Quit smoking
- Wear Sunglasses
- Regular checkups with your optometrist.
- Supplementing your diet with antioxidants and zinc. (Macuvision & Lutienvision)

Diet.

Vegetables, fish, nuts and fruit reduce the risk of developing Macular Degeneration, whereas vegetable oils increase the risk. Pure virgin olive oil is regarded as the lowest risk cooking oil.

Anti-oxidants.

Vitamins C, E, Zinc, Selenium, Lutein, Zeaxanthin, Betacarotene and bioflavonoids.

Free radicals are produced when cells turn food and oxygen into energy. These free radicals act as oxidants damaging body tissues in the same way rust damages iron.

Sources of anti-oxidants.

Vitamin C.....Citrus fruit, broccoli, potatoes, tomato, capsicum.
Vitamin E.....Nuts, Wheat germ, Green leafy vegetables
Zinc.....Meat, seafood, oysters, seeds, nuts and whole grains
Selenium.....Brazil Nuts, seafood, meat, grains and seeds
Lutein & Zeaxanthin.....Corn, Capsicum, Spinach, Egg Yolks.
Beta-carotene.....Carrots, Apricots and green leafy vegetables
Bioflavonoids.....Dark red, blue and purple berries, fruits, vegetables,
citrus pith, tea, wine, broccoli, tomato.

Fish.

Eating fish as little as once a week almost halves your risk of developing Macular degeneration. Twice a week would be even better.

Vegetable Oils.

Large consumption of vegetable oils has twice the risk of developing Macula Degeneration. No definitive research on which oils are “bad” but highly processed oils such as Canola contain unusual fatty acids that may be to blame. Villages in Italy with high Olive Oil consumption do not show an increased risk of developing Macular Degeneration.

Summary: Avoid hydrogenated fats like margarine.