

National AMD & Low Vision Awareness Month- February 2016.

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February is National AMD and Low Vision Awareness Month.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of vision loss for individuals age 50 and older. Macular degeneration is a progressive, usually painless disease that affects the macula, the spot on the retina at the back of the eye responsible for central vision, causing central vision to blur, but leaving peripheral vision intact. In its earliest stages, AMD can be difficult to diagnose. In some cases, AMD progresses so slowly that many do not notice a change in their vision. In other cases, the deterioration is very rapid and can appear to happen overnight.

There are two forms of AMD: wet and dry. It is possible to experience both forms at the same time, in one or both eyes.

There are several risks factors for AMD in two categories:

Risk Factors You Cannot Control:

- ✓ Age: AMD signs are present in about 14 percent of people under 64, 20 percent from 65 to 75 and up to 37 percent of people over 75.
- ✓ Gender: AMD is more common in women than men.
- ✓ Severe Farsightedness: Extreme farsightedness (hyperopia) is not common and is related to a severe distortion of the shape of the eye.
- ✓ AMD in one eye: If you already have AMD in one eye, you have a high chance of developing it in the other eye.
- ✓ Genetics: Learn about your family health history. If others in your family have AMD, you'll have a greater risk of developing it.

Risk Factors You Can Control:

- ✓ Smoking: Tobacco appears to interfere with the absorption of lutein, an important antioxidant that protects the retina from damaging UV light. It also results in constricted blood vessels which decreases the amount of oxygen that can be delivered to the eye.
- ✓ High Blood Pressure: Uncontrolled high blood pressure can damage the many blood vessels in the eye.
- ✓ Exposure to Sunlight: Ultraviolet light can damage your retina and increase your chances of developing AMD. It can also speed up its development. So it is very important to protect your eyes when outdoors. Wear a hat and invest in good, high quality sunglasses that screen for 100 percent of both UVA and UVB rays.
- ✓ Diet and Exercise: A balanced diet including green leafy vegetables are especially important. A healthy lifestyle that includes regular exercise in conjunction with a healthy diet will contribute to good eye health.

See your eye care professional for an evaluation if you experience these symptoms of AMD

- ✓ Straight lines appear wavy
- ✓ Difficulty seeing at a distance
- ✓ Decreased ability to distinguish colours
- ✓ Inability to see details, such as faces or words in a book
- ✓ Dark or empty spots block the centre of your vision



What is Low Vision?

People with low vision find everyday tasks difficult to do - even with the aid of regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine or surgery. Reading the mail, shopping, cooking, seeing the TV and writing can seem challenging. Their eye care physician has advised them that there isn't much that can be done to improve their vision.

There are several things a person with low vision can do to help with activities of daily living.

- ✓ To help diagnose low vision, the complete eye exam usually begins with questions about your medical history and any vision problems you might be experiencing. It also involves a number of tests designed to evaluate your vision and check for eye diseases. Your doctor may use a variety of instruments, aim bright lights directly at your eyes, and ask you to look through an array of lenses.
- ✓ Next, your doctor will check your eyes with a light to see whether the outside of your eyes are functioning correctly and whether there are any signs of injury or disease. Your eyes will also be tested for visual acuity, or how well you see.



Low Vision Aids and Low Vision Rehabilitation

- ✓ Losing vision does not mean giving up your activities, but it does mean applying new ways of doing them. Is it difficult to read newspapers and price tags, set dials, or manage glare? There are numerous tools, techniques and resources for people with low vision, including low vision aids and low vision rehabilitation.
- ✓ If your family member or friend has vision loss, he or she needs to be empowered to do as much as possible independently. Recognize the challenges of vision loss, but don't take over their tasks. Instead, help identify the adjustments they need to make to maximize their independence.



Make the most of your remaining vision

- ✓ When the centre of your vision is obscured by a blind spot, it is helpful to locate your "next best spot" (the Preferred Retinal Locus or PRL). To find your PRL, imagine that the object you want to see is in the centre of a large clock face. Move your eyes along the clock numbers and notice when you see the centre object most clearly. Use that same viewing direction for other objects.



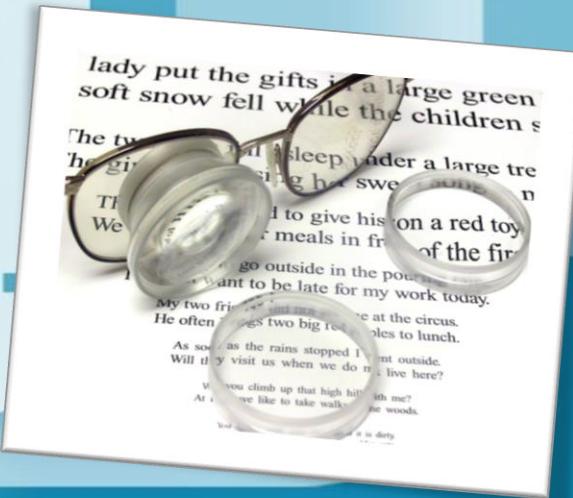
Low vision aids

- ✓ There are numerous tips and devices to help you remain independent with low vision, including making things brighter and bigger, reorganizing your home or work environment, using audio books and devices and more.



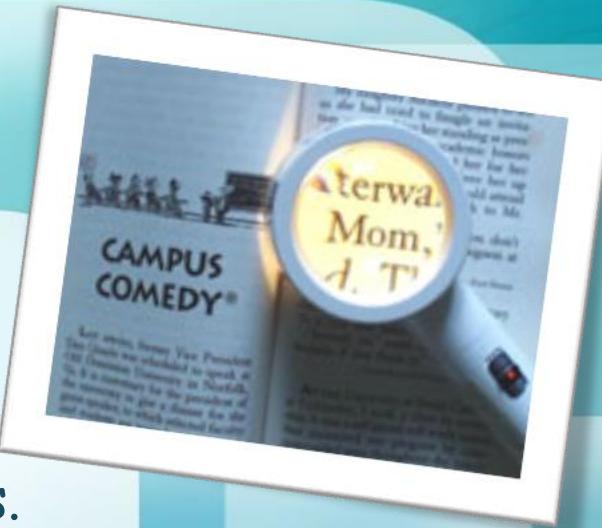
Make things brighter

- ✓ **Improve lighting.** Use a gooseneck lamp directed onto your task. Carry a penlight.
- ✓ **Reduce glare.** Indoors, cover wood tables and shiny counters; wear yellow clip-on or fit over glasses. Outdoors, try dark yellow or amber glasses. Visors can be useful indoors or out.
- ✓ **Increase contrast.** Use a black ink gel or felt pen, not a ballpoint. Draw a dark line where you need to sign. Use a white cup for coffee, for example.



Make things bigger

- ✓ **Move closer.** Sit close to the TV, and up front at performances.
- ✓ **Enlarge.** Get large checks, large-print playing cards, bingo cards, crosswords, phone dials, TV remotes, calendars, keyboards, and books.
- ✓ **Magnify.** Low vision magnifiers come in many powers and types, suited to different people and different tasks: hand-held for price tags and menus, stands and video magnifiers sentences, magnifying computer mouse.



Organize

Designate spots for the items in your refrigerator, and for your keys and wallet. Minimize clutter. Separate black clothes from blue.

- **Label things clearly** - Mark thermostats and dials with high contrast markers from a fabric store; label medications with markers or rubber bands; safety-pin the labels of similar-coloured clothing.
- **Substitute ears for eyes** - Use electronic books, e-book readers and audio books. Talking watches, clocks, calculators, glucometers, and computers are also helpful. Use reading services.





- **Participate** - Don't isolate yourself. Keep your social group, volunteer job, or outdoor or indoor games. It might require lighting, large print cards, a magnifier, a ride, or someone to watch your outdoor games. Ask for the help you need. There is nothing independent about staying home to avoid asking for help.
- **Driving** - If you are able to drive, pick your times and map routes carefully. Consider yellow or amber sunglasses for glare. But be prepared to consider whether or not driving is a good idea. Otherwise consider transportation alternatives. Hire a driver or arrange for a taxi. Share your car or buy gas for a friend who drives. Use senior and public transit systems. Try a three-wheel bike or battery-powered scooter at walking speed. Walk if you are able. The future will offer even more solutions.

References

- ✓ <https://www.hap.org>
- ✓ <http://www.preventblindness.org>
- ✓ <http://www.ao.org/eye-health/diseases/low-vision>

