

## **Focusing on Macular Degeneration**

By Susan Locke, M.D., Medical Director

For many older people, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of vision loss and may be the likely culprit of blurred vision, difficulty recognizing faces and straight lines that appear wavy. AMD gradually destroys the sharp, central vision needed to see objects clearly, making common daily tasks such as driving nearly impossible.

There are two types of AMD: “dry” and “wet.” Dry AMD accounts for 85-90% of cases and occurs when light-sensitive cells in the macula slowly break down. It typically progresses slowly and individuals who have the condition can lead relatively normal and productive lives. However, at any time dry AMD can develop into the more severe form of macular degeneration known as wet AMD.

Wet macular degeneration occurs when abnormal blood vessels behind the retina start to grow under the macula. These vessels often leak blood and fluid and can damage the macula rapidly, causing a quick loss of central vision. Wet AMD does not have stages; all are considered advanced.

There are common risk factors for dry and wet forms of AMD: Age, gender, race, family history, smoking, light-colored eyes, cardiovascular disease and UV exposure. AMD is detected during a comprehensive eye exam which includes visual acuity testing, dilated eye exam, and eye pressure measurements. If wet AMD is suspected, a fluorescein angiogram may be ordered. (See quick test at the end of this article).

Treatment options differ for wet and dry AMD. If you are diagnosed with dry AMD, treatments may delay the advancement of the disease. The Age-Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS) from the National Eye Institute found that a specific high-dose formulation of antioxidants and zinc significantly



reduced the progression from the intermediate stage to the advanced stage of AMD.

There are several treatment options for wet AMD, although there is no cure and vision loss may progress despite treatment. One should discuss treatment options with their ophthalmologist.

For more specific information we turned to world-renowned ophthalmologist, Neil Bressler, M.D., Chief of the Wilmer Eye Institute's Retina Division at Johns Hopkins Hospital.



**Q: Can people with an early stage of AMD take the AREDS formulation to help prevent the disease from progressing to an intermediate stage?**

*A: The AREDS formulation only has been shown to reduce the risk of progression from the intermediate stage of AMD to an advanced stage. If one has no AMD or only an early stage of AMD, regardless of one's family history, the strongest evidence suggests that the AREDS formulation will not reduce one's risk from developing an intermediate stage of AMD.*

**Q: If one has been a smoker and quits, will this significantly reduce their risk of AMD?**

*A: There is strong evidence to suggest that cigarette smoking is associated with the development or progression of AMD. Since there is strong evidence that when one quits smoking, one reduces one's risk of progression of other diseases, one should consider*

quitting smoking. It is not known how long one must quit to reduce one's risk.

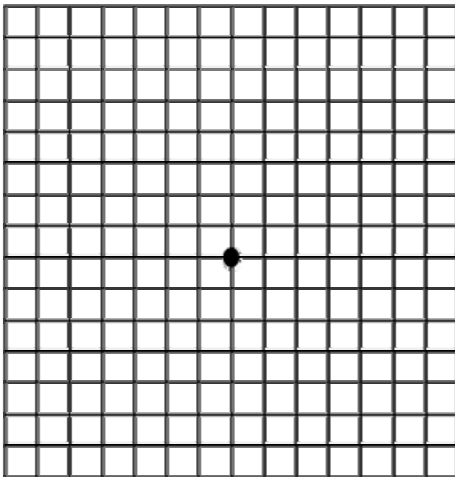
**Q: Do you recommend any alternative medicine techniques?**

*A: The strongest scientific evidence would not suggest that one should take any complementary or alternative medicine technique for AMD at this time.*

\*Participation by Dr. Neil Bressler in this activity does not constitute or imply endorsement by the Johns Hopkins University, the Johns Hopkins Hospital, or the Johns Hopkins Health System\*

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**AMSLER GRID TEST:**



Take this test to determine whether you have macular degeneration or other vision problems.

Cover one eye and focus on the dot in the center.

- Do any of the lines look blurry, wavy or distorted?
- Are there missing areas or dark areas in the grid?
- Can you see all corners and sides of the grid?

Remember to test both eyes.

Report any irregularity to your eye doctor immediately or call Healthnetwork for a referral.



**Susan Locke, M.D.**  
Medical Director  
*Healthnetwork Foundation*

Have a health question you want to ask Dr. Locke? Send an email to [help@healthnetworkfoundation.org](mailto:help@healthnetworkfoundation.org). All inquiries are kept private and confidential.

Healthnetwork partners with over 30 top-tier medical institutions. If you have questions about AMD or if you are interested in scheduling an appointment with an ophthalmologist, contact Healthnetwork today.

**One Call Starts It All**  
866-968-2467 or 440-893-0830