



Eye on Health

Americans Uneducated About the Leading Cause of Blindness in People Over 50

Regular Eye Exams Are Critical To Early Detection Of Macular Degeneration

(NAPSA)—Macular degeneration, also known as age-related macular degeneration or AMD, is the leading cause of blindness in people over 50. However, seven out of 10 Americans are unaware of the condition.

February is AMD Awareness Month and Jason Slakter, M.D., a board certified vitreoretinal surgeon and a macular disease specialist at the Manhattan Eye, Ear & Throat Hospital, answers some common questions about macular degeneration.

Q: What is macular degeneration?

A: Macular degeneration is a retinal eye disease that causes loss of central vision. It can affect normal everyday activities like recognizing faces, driving a car, identifying currency, reading and watching television. There are two forms of macular degeneration: “wet” and “dry.” The “wet” form is responsible for 90 percent of the severe vision loss associated with the condition. In the United States, 200,000 new cases of “wet” AMD are diagnosed each year.

Q: What age group is most at risk?

A: Doctors say incidence of macular degeneration increases significantly with age. By the time you reach 65, there is a one in four chance of getting the disease.

Q: How can I detect macular degeneration?

A: Early detection through annual eye exams is critical to identifying treatment options. If left untreated, the wet form of macular degeneration can quickly result in vision loss, which may lead to legal blindness in many cases. Be sure to visit your eye doctor regularly and ask to be tested for macular degeneration.

Q: Wouldn't I know if I had macular degeneration?

A: You could have no apparent symptoms and still be developing either the “wet” or “dry” form of the disease. Often times, as one



eye develops symptoms, your other eye compensates for the vision loss. You may not notice the vision loss until it becomes very apparent.

Q: What are some apparent symptoms of macular degeneration?

A: Symptoms can include:

- Difficulty seeing details at a distance or during twilight hours
- Difficulty reading fine print
- Distortion causing straight lines to appear wavy
- Blurring of faces and other objects
- Dark or empty spaces blocking the center of vision

Remember, it's important to detect the disease before these symptoms occur. Annual eye exams are the best way to do this.

Q: My friend was diagnosed with “wet” macular degeneration. Is there hope?

A: Yes. In addition to regular thermal laser treatment, the FDA has approved Visudyne® therapy, which can be used in about 40 percent of newly-diagnosed “wet” AMD cases. Visudyne therapy uses a non-thermal laser (a laser that does not burn the retina) to activate an intravenously administered light-sensitive drug. This painless procedure takes place in a doctor's office on an out-patient basis. Visudyne therapy may slow or stop the progression of the condition in many cases.

For more information about AMD, visit www.amdfacts.com or call 1-800-AMD-1153.