

OAKLEIGH EYE CENTRE

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AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

WHAT IS AMD?

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is the damage or breakdown of the macula or central region of the retina due to ageing.

The macula is a small area near the centre of the retina. It gives the sharp straight ahead vision needed for driving, reading and distinguishing colour. The retina is the delicate layer of tissue that lines the inside wall of the back of the eye. It is made up of cells sensitive to light, which allow us to “see”.

AMD does not result in total blindness. Peripheral or side vision remains. AMD cannot be corrected by stronger prescription glasses, although they may help with limited reading vision.

WHAT CAUSES AMD?

AMD is the most common cause of vision impairment in people over 70 years of age in Australia. It is not contagious, but there may be a tendency for it to run in families. It usually affects both eyes.

The most common form of AMD is “dry” AMD. It is associated with the breakdown or thinning of the tissues behind the macula. Vision usually deteriorates slowly over many years.

The less common AMD is “wet” AMD where new blood vessels grow beneath the macula. These abnormal vessels leak fluid and blood causing scar tissue to form. Vision deteriorates quickly. Treatment is with injections into the eye. Sometimes laser treatment can be used to seal off the leaking blood vessels.

AMD can be diagnosed during a routine eye examination. Your eye specialist may suggest that photographs be taken of the retina to obtain a clearer picture of the back of the eye. This procedure is called Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT).

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HOW WILL AMD AFFECT MY VISION?

Initially, the change in your vision may go unnoticed, as AMD usually begins in one eye. Later, as the second eye is affected, your vision may become dimmer. It may be more difficult to hit a tennis ball, straight lines may become wavy and parts of words may disappear. At a late stage, you may notice that objects also become very blurry or disappear.

Difficulty will occur in recognising people's faces, reading, writing and other close work. This can be extremely frustrating. Driving may not be legally possible.

You may notice that you can see objects "out of the corner of your eye". This is your peripheral or side vision. This vision will remain and be extremely useful for moving about your environment.

HINTS THAT MAY HELP YOU

VISION TRAINING: Training can assist you to use your side vision effectively. This is called Eccentric Viewing.

LIGHTING: The use of good overhead lighting and well placed lamps can greatly enhance your remaining vision.

CONTRAST: The use of contrasting colours between background and object is helpful. A black felt tipped pen on white paper can help you to read notes. Food can be more easily seen on non-patterned, pastel coloured plates.

DISTANCE: If you want to watch television, move as close as is comfortable to view the screen.

GLARE: Glare will affect your sight. Always sit with your back to the window.

READING: Mail, bills and other printed materials may be read using a magnifier. Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), large print computer programs and enlarged text may assist your study and work practices.

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MARKING: Lines or spots of colour contrasting with the background can help you to mark items such as the correct setting for the oven and the 'on' and 'off' position for electronic equipment.

The Effect of Antioxidant Vitamins and Zinc on Age Related Macular Degeneration and Cataract

Results of the Age Related Eye Disease Study

High levels of antioxidants and zinc significantly reduce the risk of advanced age related macular degeneration (AMD) by about 25%. These same nutrients also reduce the risk of vision loss caused by advanced AMD by about 19%.

These results are from the Age Related Eye Disease Study (AREDS), a major clinical trial sponsored by the National Eye Institute, USA. The nutrients are not a cure for AMD, nor will they restore vision already lost from the disease. However, they may play a key role in helping people at high risk for developing advanced AMD keep their vision.

Who Should Take the Nutrients?

People who are at high risk for developing advanced AMD should consider taking the Study formulation. If you are already taking multivitamins and your doctor suggests you take the formulation used in the AREDS, review all the supplements with your doctor.

What is the dosage of the Nutrients Used in the Study?

The specific daily amounts of antioxidants and minerals used by the study researchers were **500 milligrams of vitamin C; 400 international units of vitamin E; 15 milligrams of beta-carotene; 80 milligrams of zinc as zinc oxide; and two milligrams of copper as cupric oxide.** Copper was added to the AREDS formulations containing zinc to prevent copper deficiency, which may be associated with high levels of zinc supplementation.

Where Can I Obtain the Formulation Used in the Study?

Various companies make the AREDS formulation. They can be bought in pharmacies or on line.

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Are There Any Side Effects from the Nutrients?

The AREDS participants reported few side effects from the treatments. About 7.5% of participants assigned to the zinc treatments – compared with 5% who did not have zinc in their assigned treatment – had urinary tract problems that required hospitalisation. Participants in the two groups that took zinc also reported anaemia at a slightly higher rate; however, testing of all patients for this disorder showed no difference among treatment groups. Yellowing of the skin, a well-known side effect of large doses of beta-carotene, was reported slightly more often by participants taking antioxidants. In two large clinical trials sponsored by the National Cancer Institute, beta-carotene was shown to significantly increase the risk of lung cancer among smokers.

Smoking increases the risk of blindness in AMD and all patients with AMD should stop smoking. The increased risk of death from lung cancer due to the beta-carotene in formulation is an important issue.

Please check with your GP if there could be any problems with your existing medication before taking these supplements.