

# Age-related Macular Degeneration (ARMD)

Information and advice for patients

## *Ophthalmology*

### **What is macula?**

The macula is a small part of the retina which is a light-sensitive layer lining the inside of the eye. All parts of the retina contribute to sight; the macula is responsible for central vision i.e. reading and writing vision.

### **What is age-related macular degeneration (ARMD)?**

There are two types of ARMD and it is one of the main causes of visual loss in the elderly. The two types are:

**Dry** A wearing out of the retina at the macula, gradually damaging central vision.

**Wet** The formation of little blood vessels which grow under the retina at the macula. These blood vessels bleed and damage the retina. Eventually the blood turns into a scar destroying the macula.

### **What causes it?**

Little is known about the cause of ARMD although it is a common condition. We do know that it only affects the central part of the vision (what we see directly in front of us) and usually occurs after the age of 65 years however it can affect people at a younger age.

### **What are the symptoms?**

One of the earliest symptoms is visual distortion, with straight lines appearing wavy. As the condition progresses people often notice a blank patch or dark spot in the centre of their vision. This makes activities like reading, writing and recognising small objects or faces very difficult.

### **Can it affect both eyes?**

Yes. If you have macular degeneration in one eye there is a chance that the other eye could be affected later. If you develop symptoms in the good eye you should see an eye doctor as soon as possible.

### **Will I go blind?**

No. Macular degeneration only damages the central vision (reading and writing vision). This means that the peripheral, outside vision is not affected so you should be able to maintain your independence, but may need time to adapt.

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### **How is it diagnosed?**

Diagnosis of ARMD is based on clinical assessment and certain tests. The tests most commonly used are fundus fluorescein angiography (FFA) and optical coherence tomography (OCT). If you are offered these tests the doctor or nurse will provide you with further information.

### **How is it treated?**

**Dry ARMD** So far no treatment is available for this. We hope to be part of future trials that may offer treatment for the first time on a research basis initially.

### **Wet ARMD**

The treatments for Wet ARMD are as follows:

#### **Lucentis injection**

This is a drug licensed for injection into the eye to treat wet ARMD. The injection is carried out in clinic. For more information please see the leaflet on Lucentis.

#### **Avastin injections**

This is a drug injected into the eyeball which can stop the growth of abnormal blood vessels at the back of the eye. So far it has only been approved for the treatment of colorectal cancer, but some doctors can use it to treat ARMD. For more information please see the leaflet on Avastin.

#### **Photodynamic Therapy with Visudyne (PDT)**

PDT/Visudyne therapy is a laser treatment which works by destroying abnormal blood vessels that grow behind the retina at the back of your eye. This can slow down the progressive loss of sight. For more information please see the leaflet on PDT (a Guide to Visudyne therapy).

### **How you can help yourself**

If reading is difficult large print books are available in most public libraries.

Some patients are registered as visually impaired which means they may be entitled to help from social services if they meet registration criteria.

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Low vision assessment clinics (LVA clinics) are hospital based specialist optometry services. They offer alternative ways to cope with sight problems, such as special equipment for the kitchen, magnifying glasses, larger print books etc.

National charities such as RNIB offer information, advice and support to people with sight loss. Local groups such as Focus can also offer advice.

## **Contact details**

If you have any further questions, please contact the Eye Emergency Department on:

Tel: 0121 507 6780  
Monday – Friday, 9am – 7pm

## **Further information**

### **RNIB**

Royal National Institute of Blind People  
105 Judd Street  
London  
WC1H 9NE  
[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0303 123 9999

### **AMD Alliance**

[www.amdalliance.org](http://www.amdalliance.org)  
[info@amdalliance.org](mailto:info@amdalliance.org)

### **The Royal College of Ophthalmologists**

[www.rcophth.ac.uk](http://www.rcophth.ac.uk)  
020 7935 0702

### **Focus Birmingham**

[www.focusbirmingham.org.uk](http://www.focusbirmingham.org.uk)  
0121 478 5222

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### **The Macular Disease Society**

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[info@maculardisease.org](mailto:info@maculardisease.org)

01264 350551

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com), follow us on Twitter @SWBHNhs and like us on Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHNhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHNhs).

## **References**

- Royal College of Ophthalmologists clinical guidelines, 'Age-related Macular Degeneration Guidelines for Management', 2013

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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