

Macular Degeneration

Recently I had someone apologize to me for asking me a health question after church. I appreciated that because we want the physicians and other healthcare professionals in our congregation to be able to come to church just to worship and to be fed and nurtured. However, I just want to let you know, it is ok to ask questions of those of us who have volunteered to be a part of the Parish Health Project. We've chosen this volunteer position, not to give medical advice or diagnose anything, but to help connect people with the information they need.

This month no one asked me to research any particular topic so I am choosing to discuss macular degeneration. I probably should call it by its full name, Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD,) but it makes me feel old so I leave off that age part. You see, I have this condition myself, and I am certain others in our congregation do as well.

There are two kinds of macular degeneration, dry and wet. Actually, it all begins as dry but about 10% may progress to the wet version. The difference is that the wet type refers to fragile, leaky little blood vessels that develop, causing even more eye damage.

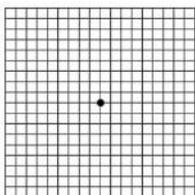
Macular Degeneration is an eye condition that causes damage to the macula, the part of the retina that provides your sharp, central vision. Sometimes it progresses so slowly that the person notices little or no changes in their vision. Other times it causes enough damage that the person no longer has central vision and is considered legally blind. The loss of central vision makes it difficult to recognize faces or to read. Most activities become more difficult or even impossible.



Early symptoms include slightly blurred central vision, distortion of lines or grids or the need for more and more light to do things like reading. My early symptoms were easily ignored. Macular Degeneration wasn't even on my radar so I was pretty insulted when my eye doctor gave me this diagnosis.

So, what to do? Well, first of all, be sure to keep your yearly eye appointments. If AMD or any other condition is found, there are things you can do to help. I was advised to immediately go on eye formula supplements that say AREDS 2 on the bottle. There are several brands of these. I was also reminded to follow a healthy diet with plenty of antioxidants, think lots of colorful fruits and vegetables. Exercise regularly. Monitor and maintain healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels, anything that could increase inflammation. Obesity and smoking also increase the risk for macular degeneration.

It is vital to protect your eyes! After some study, I learned that I should choose sunglasses that not only block UV rays but also blue rays. I hate this part, but they need to be those kind that shield the top and sides as well. Hats or anything that shields your eyes from the sun are a great idea also.



My eye doctor gave me a copy of the Amsler Grid. It is a simple grid of lines that I am to look at regularly with one eye at a time, noting any distortions, blurred or dark spots and reporting significant changes to my doctor. The main reason for this is to act quickly to get treatment should it ever advance to the wet version of AMD. If any of you want an Amsler Grid just ask me and I will get a copy for you, or simply google "Amsler Grid" and you will find many.

AMD is currently not curable. However, by following the suggestions named above, a person may be able to greatly slow the progression of the damage. My eye doctor also told me there are some interesting studies for what may be effective treatments for the future. Hope!

