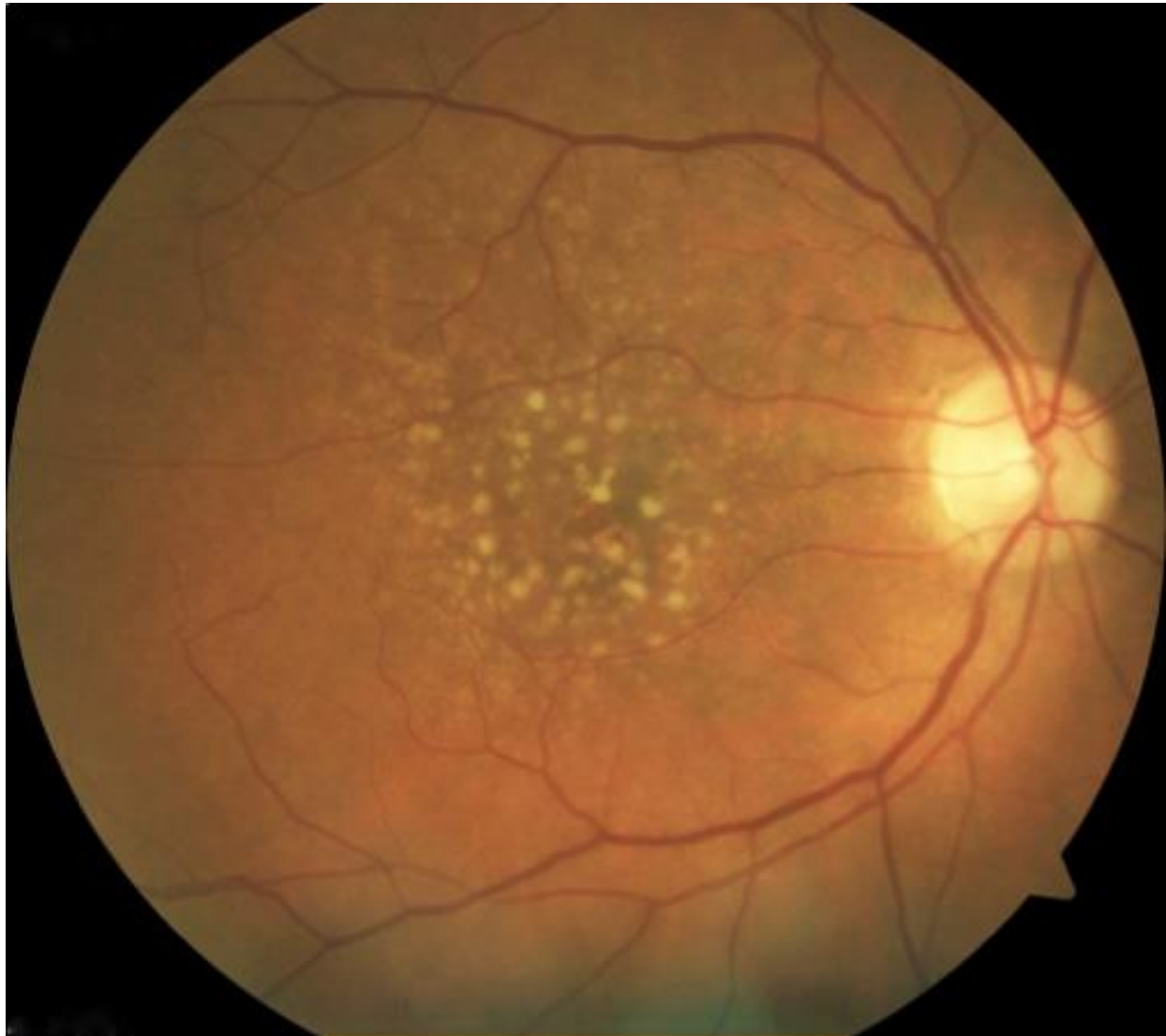


What is Macular Degeneration?



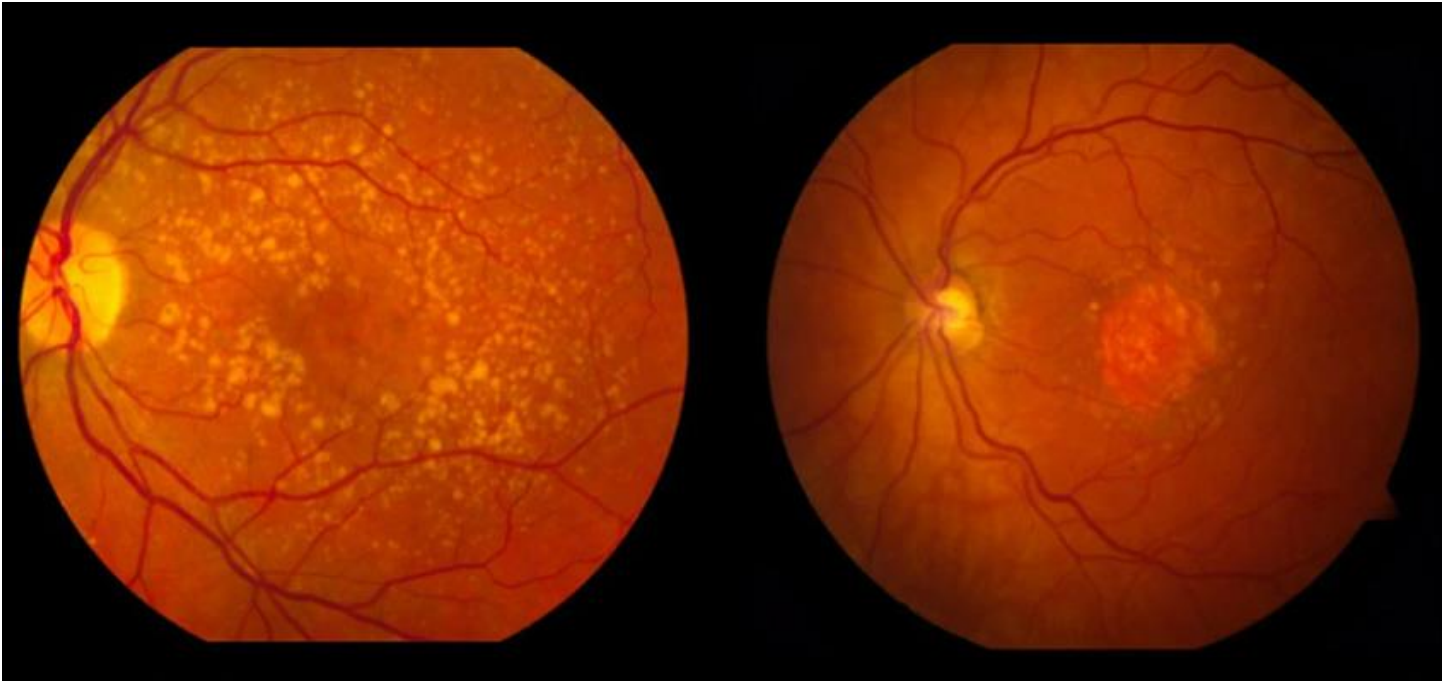


What Is Macular Degeneration?

Have you noticed that reading or seeing fine details has become more difficult, even though your side vision seems fine? This could be a sign of macular degeneration, also known as age-related macular degeneration (AMD). It's one of the leading causes of vision loss in adults over 50, but the good news is that early detection and healthy habits can help protect your sight.

Understanding the Macula

The macula is a small but vital part of your retina — the light-sensitive layer at the back of your eye. It's responsible for central vision, the part you use for reading, recognizing faces, and seeing fine detail. When the macula becomes damaged, your central vision may become blurry or distorted, while your peripheral (side) vision usually remains normal.

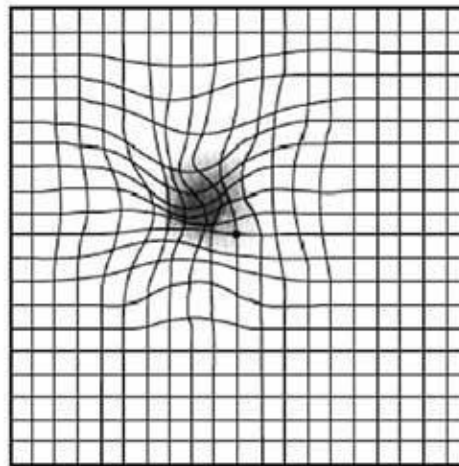
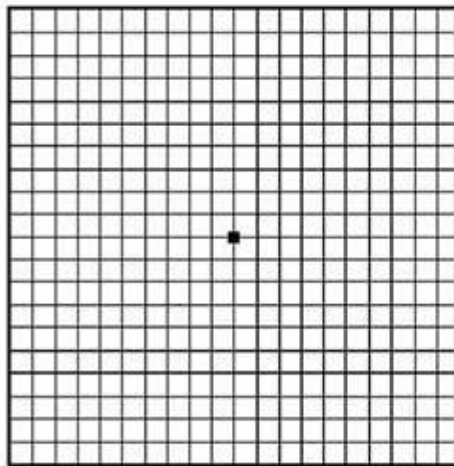


Types of Macular Degeneration

There are two main types of AMD: dry and wet.

- **Dry (atrophic) AMD** is the most common type (above left), affecting about 8 in 10 people with macular degeneration. It develops slowly as light-sensitive cells in the macula break down over time.
- **Wet (neovascular) AMD** is less common but more serious (above right). It occurs when abnormal blood vessels grow under the retina and leak fluid or blood, leading to faster and more severe vision loss.

Dry AMD can sometimes progress into wet AMD, so **regular eye exams are important** to catch any changes early.



What Are the Symptoms?

AMD often develops gradually, so you might not notice changes at first. Your vision usually seems different from each eye. Common symptoms include:

- Blurry or fuzzy central vision
- Difficulty reading or recognizing faces
- Straight lines that appear wavy or distorted
- A dark or empty area in the center of vision
- Needing brighter light for close work
- Colors that seem faded or dull

What Causes Macular Degeneration?

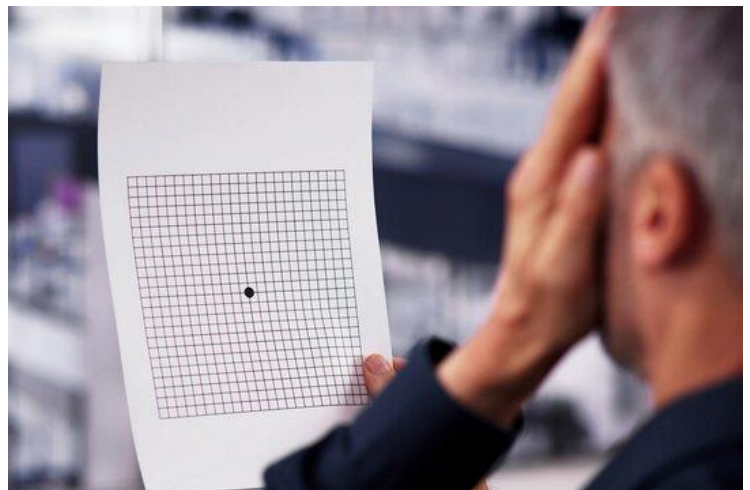
The exact cause isn't fully understood, but AMD is linked to both aging and lifestyle factors. The risk increases with:

- **Age:** Most people with AMD are over 50.
- **Family history:** If close relatives have AMD, your risk is higher.
- **Smoking:** This is one of the strongest risk factors — smokers are up to four times more likely to develop AMD.
- **Poor diet:** Lacking certain vitamins and antioxidants can affect eye health.
- **High blood pressure** or heart disease
- **Excess sunlight exposure**

How Is AMD Diagnosed?

Your eye doctor can detect AMD during a comprehensive eye exam. They'll look at your retina using special lenses and may take photographs or perform a scan called an OCT (optical coherence tomography), to see detailed images of your macula.

You may also be given an Amsler grid — a simple grid of lines used at home to check for wavy or missing areas in your vision.



Can Macular Degeneration Be Treated?

There is no cure for AMD, but treatments can slow its progression and preserve vision.

For dry AMD: Lifestyle changes and certain vitamin supplements (the AREDS2 formula) can help slow down damage.

For wet AMD: Eye injections with medications that stop abnormal blood vessel growth can help prevent further vision loss — and sometimes improve sight.

Your eye doctor will recommend the best management plan for your type and stage of AMD.

How Can I Reduce My Risk?

While you can't control your age or family history, you can take steps to protect your eyes:

- **Don't smoke.** Smoking greatly increases your risk of AMD and speeds up its progression. Quitting can make a real difference.
- **Eat a healthy, balanced diet.** Include green leafy vegetables (like spinach and kale), brightly colored fruits, and fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids (like salmon or sardines). These foods contain nutrients that support retinal health.
- **Take eye-specific vitamins** if advised. Supplements containing lutein, zeaxanthin, zinc, and vitamins C and E can help people at higher risk. Ask your optometrist before starting any supplements.
- **Wear sunglasses with UV protection.** Ultraviolet light can damage the retina over time.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Keep your blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight under control through regular exercise and good nutrition.
- **Have regular eye exams.** Early detection is key — it allows treatment to start before significant vision loss occurs.



In Summary

Macular degeneration affects the part of your eye that lets you see fine details. While it can't be completely prevented or cured, healthy choices like not smoking, eating well, and protecting your eyes from sunlight can lower your risk. Regular eye exams are essential — catching AMD early gives you the best chance to keep your vision sharp and maintain your independence.