

Protect your vision from macular degeneration

As you age, the importance of a regular eye exam becomes even more important. It's easy to dismiss vision troubles as part of aging, but early detection can help catch minor problems before they turn major.

The most common cause of blindness among Americans over age 50 is macular degeneration.¹ This age related disease results in a loss of vision in the center of the visual field (the macula) because of damage to the retina. In the early stages, treatments can be used to prevent the disease from getting worse. Symptoms may not become apparent until the disease has already progressed, making treatment less effective in later stages. An annual comprehensive eye exam can help detect early warning signs and reduce your risk of vision loss.

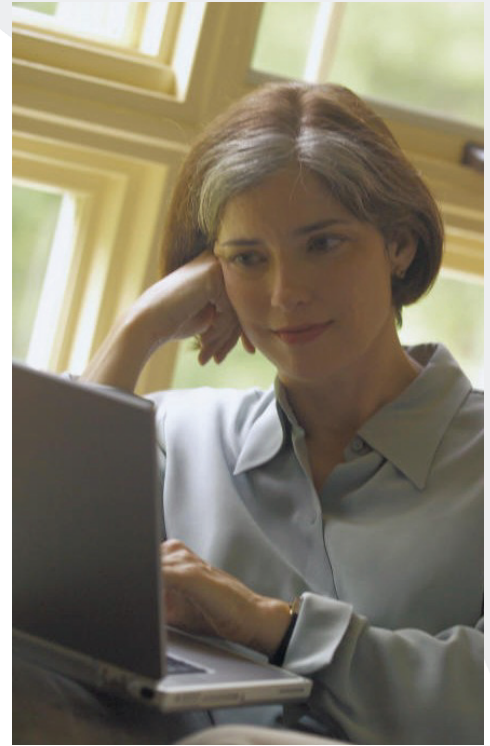
Be alert for signs that may indicate you may have macular degeneration. Common symptoms include:

- Gradual vision loss
- Distortedness
- Blurry vision
- Dark or empty spots in center of vision
- Straight lines seem crooked

Regardless of your physical health, you may still be at risk for developing macular degeneration. Common risk factors include:

- **Age:** Age is the largest risk factor for macular degeneration. It is recommended for individuals over age 40 to have an eye exam annually.
- **Gender:** Females appear to be at greater risk than males
- **Race:** Caucasians, African Americans and Asians are at a higher risk
- **Family history:** Those with immediate family members who have macular degeneration are at a higher risk of developing the disease
- **Smoking:** Smokers are 2.5 times more likely to develop than nonsmokers¹
- **Cardiovascular disease:** This includes high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack and coronary artery disease with chest pain (angina)
- **Obesity:** Being severely overweight increases the chance that early or intermediate macular degeneration will progress to the more severe form of the disease

The single most important thing you can do to protect your vision and help reduce the progression of macular degeneration is to have an annual eye exam. As with all diseases, early detection is vital for your health and well-being. **Schedule your eye exam today.**



Did you know...?

- Macular degeneration is expected to rise to approximately 18 million cases in 2050 with as many as 9.1 million being affected by 2010.²
- People with macular degeneration are at a substantial risk of vision loss
- Early diagnosis and treatment can slow or even stop the progression of macular degeneration

¹ American Optometric Association, 2009

² US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2009

³ Mayo Clinic, 2009