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Wet macular degeneration



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Wet macular degeneration is a chronic eye disorder that causes blurred vision or a blind spot in your visual field. It's generally caused by abnormal blood vessels that leak fluid or blood into the macula (MAK-u-luh). The macula is in the part of the retina responsible for central vision.



Vision with macular degeneration

Wet macular degeneration is one of two types of age-related macular degeneration. The other type — dry macular degeneration — is more common and less severe. The wet type always begins as the dry type.

Early detection and treatment of wet macular degeneration may help reduce vision loss and, in some instances, recover vision.

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Symptoms

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Wet macular degeneration symptoms usually appear suddenly and worsen rapidly. They may include:

- Visual distortions, such as straight lines seeming bent
- Reduced central vision in one or both eyes
- The need for brighter light when reading or doing close-up work
- Increased difficulty adapting to low light levels, such as when entering a dimly lit restaurant
- Increased blurriness of printed words
- Decreased intensity or brightness of colors
- Difficulty recognizing faces
- A well-defined blurry spot or blind spot in your field of vision

Macular degeneration doesn't affect side (peripheral) vision, so it rarely causes total blindness.

When to see a doctor

See your eye doctor if:

- You notice changes in your central vision
- Your ability to see colors and fine detail becomes impaired

These changes may be the first indication of macular degeneration, particularly if you're older than age 60.

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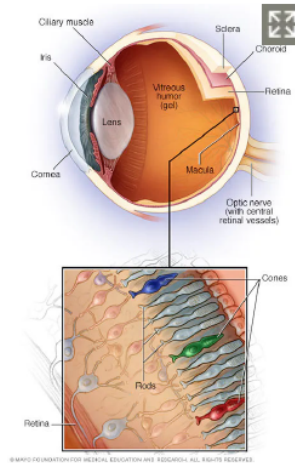
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No one knows the exact cause of wet macular degeneration, but it develops in people who have had dry macular degeneration. Of all people with age-related macular degeneration, about 20% have the wet form.

Wet macular degeneration can develop in different ways:

- **Vision loss caused by abnormal blood vessel growth.** Sometimes abnormal new blood vessels grow from the choroid under and into the macula (choroidal neovascularization). The choroid is the layer of blood vessels between the retina and the outer, firm coat of the eye (sclera). These abnormal blood vessels may leak fluid or blood, interfering with the retina's function.
- **Vision loss caused by fluid buildup in the back of the eye.** When fluid leaks from the choroid, it can collect between the thin cell layer called the retinal pigment epithelium and the retina or within the layers of the retina. This may cause a bump in the macula, resulting in vision loss or distortion.



Parts of the eye

Risk factors

Factors that may increase your risk of macular degeneration include:

- **Age.** This disease is most common in people over 55.
- **Family history and genetics.** This disease has a hereditary component. Researchers have identified several genes related to developing the condition.
- **Race.** Macular degeneration is more common in Caucasians.
- **Smoking.** Smoking cigarettes or being regularly exposed to smoke significantly increases your risk of macular degeneration.
- **Obesity.** Research indicates that being obese increases the chance that early or intermediate macular degeneration will progress to a more severe form of the disease.
- **Cardiovascular disease.** If you have diseases that affect your heart and blood vessels, you may be at higher risk of macular degeneration.

Complications

People whose wet macular degeneration has progressed to central vision loss have a higher risk of depression and social isolation. With profound loss of vision, people may see visual hallucinations (Charles Bonnet syndrome).

Prevention

It's important to have routine eye exams to identify early signs of macular degeneration. The following measures may help reduce your risk of developing wet macular degeneration:

- **Manage your other medical conditions.** For example, if you have cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure, take your medication and follow your doctor's instructions for controlling the condition.
- **Don't smoke.** Smokers are more likely to develop macular degeneration than are nonsmokers. Ask your doctor for help to stop smoking.
- **Maintain a healthy weight and exercise regularly.** If you need to lose weight, reduce the number of calories you eat and increase the amount of exercise you get each day.
- **Choose a diet rich in fruits and vegetables.** Choose a healthy diet that's full of a variety of fruits and vegetables. These foods contain antioxidant vitamins that reduce your risk of developing macular degeneration.
- **Include fish in your diet.** Omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in fish, may reduce the risk of macular degeneration. Nuts, such as walnuts, also contain omega-3 fatty acids.

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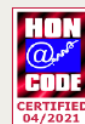
  


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