

## MACULAR DEGENERATION

### What is Macular Degeneration?

Macular Degeneration is often referred to as Age-related Macular Degeneration or ARMD. It usually afflicts people over the age of fifty and can affect one or both eyes. ARMD is a breakdown in the central most area of retinal tissue lining the back of the eye. This central area is called the macula. It is responsible for our central or “straight ahead” vision. As the tissue breaks down, the patient may experience visual disturbances. ARMD usually progresses very slowly over the course of many years but can eventually lead to permanent loss of central vision. Patients with ARMD rarely go blind. Their peripheral vision or ability to see to the side remains mostly unaffected. However, this type of limited vision makes it hard to do close work, read, or watch TV.

### How do you get it?

It is not known why people get macular degeneration. However, we know it is most often related to age, more likely to affect people with light hair and/or fair skin, or may be hereditary and run in families.

### Is it treatable or preventable?

At the time, NO treatment has been uniformly effective, but promising new treatments are being developed. Some less common forms of Macular Degeneration have responded in part to ophthalmic laser treatments. In more advanced cases, low vision aids are available to help treat patients. However, in recent years the single most promising factor in prevention or treatment of ARMD is a diet or vitamin supplement rich in antioxidants and lutein. Numerous research papers have been published in medical journals documenting the stabilization and lower occurrence of ARMD in subjects with an intake of not less than 20mg of lutein per day. We recommend a multivitamin which includes 20mg of elemental lutein intake per day. While there are some factors which you cannot control, such as age, heredity, and gender, you can control your lifestyle and diet. Even the very young should wear sunglasses and brimmed hats to protect their eyes from direct or reflected sunlight. Eat a diet rich in fruits, green leafy vegetables, carrots, and fleshy orange winter squashes. If you smoke, stop. Limit your intake of alcohol, saturated fats, and cholesterol. Get proper rest and do some form of exercise on a daily basis to maintain circulation. But most importantly, regular exams by an ophthalmologist are crucial in detecting the early signs ARMD and perhaps preventing or slowing the advancement of vision loss. Often, when symptoms of ARMD are noticeable, the person is no longer in the early stages and the vision loss is permanent.

Although there is no cure for ARMD, the emphasis is on prevention and maintenance. The results of the studies are clear. You can help maintain functional vision for the duration of your life. The best way to accomplish this is the basics of good health and nutrition, protecting your eyes from UV rays, and **regular comprehensive eye examinations as recommended by your eye doctor.**