

What is Macular Degeneration?

- ◆ Macular degeneration is a common, acquired degenerative disease that affects the macula, which is the part of the retina that is needed to read and see objects clearly.
- ◆ Few people are aware that macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness for people over the age of 55 in the United States. It affects over 10 million Americans.
- ◆ The causes of macular degeneration are still unknown. There are two types of macular degeneration, "dry" and "wet". Ninety percent of all people with macular degeneration have the dry form. It most commonly causes a slow progressive loss of fine, central visual acuity. Wet macular degeneration is caused by abnormal blood vessels growing under the macula. These blood vessels are fragile and can begin to leak blood and serum under the macula

resulting in scarring. Although only ten percent of all people with macular degeneration have the wet form, it accounts for 90% of all central blindness from the disease.



How is Macular Degeneration Detected?

- ◆ Early detection is important and your ophthalmologist will dilate your eyes in order to carefully examine your retina. Abnormal yellow deposits, or drusen, are often the first physical sign of macular degeneration. A special test called a Fluorescein Angiogram may be performed to further evaluate your retina. An angiogram is a series of photographs that are taken of your retina after fluorescein dye has been injected into a small vein in your arm.

How is Macular Degeneration Treated?

- ◆ In most cases, there is currently no known effective treatment. Certain types of wet macular degeneration may be treated with laser. The laser would be used in an attempt to obliterate abnormal blood vessels. When to use laser depends upon the exact location and degree of leakage or bleeding.
- ◆ Recent studies have shown that taking antioxidant vitamins and the mineral zinc may slow down the progression of macular degeneration. Your ophthalmologist may also recommend that you monitor your vision with an amsler grid. If you experience wavy vision, or notice that straight lines appear distorted, you should contact your ophthalmologist immediately.

