



ASK THE OPTOMETRIST

ASK THE OPTOMETRIST IS A SERIES OF INFORMATION NEWSLETTERS THAT WE ARE PLEASED TO PROVIDE OUR PATIENTS TO ELABORATE ON A VARIETY OF RELEVANT EYECARE TOPICS.

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD)

Q1: WHAT IS AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION?

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION, OR AMD, IS A DEGENERATIVE PROCESS THAT AFFECTS THE AREA OF THE RETINA (THE LIGHT SENSITIVE TISSUE LINING THE INSIDE OF THE EYE) RESPONSIBLE FOR CENTRAL VISION (THE MACULA). IT IS MORE COMMON AS WE AGE, AND IN CERTAIN DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS – IN FACT, AS MANY AS 15% OF CAUCASIAN WOMEN OVER THE AGE OF 80 HAVE SOME DEGREE OF AMD. WHILE WE CAN'T CONTROL OUR AGE, WE CAN MODIFY OUR BEHAVIOR – FOR EXAMPLE, **SMOKING CAN INCREASE THE RISK OF AMD BY A FACTOR OF 6.**

Q2: WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF AMD?

AMD IS CHARACTERIZED BY CENTRAL DISTORTION OR BLURRING OF THE VISION THAT CAN PROGRESS TO A 'BLIND SPOT' SHOULD THERE BE BLEEDING OR SCARRING. AS WITH MANY DISEASE PROCESSES, EARLY DETECTION IS CRITICAL.

Q3: HOW WILL MY OPTOMETRIST TEST FOR AMD?

THE MOST ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF ANY COMPREHENSIVE EXAM, PARTICULARLY FOR SENIORS, IS THE OCULAR HEALTH ASSESSMENT. A DILATED RETINAL EXAM, USING DROPS TO ENLARGE THE PUPIL, PROVIDES YOUR OPTOMETRIST WITH AN EXCELLENT VIEW OF THE MACULA, WHERE SIGNS OF AMD MAY BE EVIDENT BEFORE ANY SYMPTOMS DEVELOP. AN AMSLER GRID MAY BE USED TO MAP ANY DISTORTION, AND FOR HOME MONITORING OF AMD.

Q4: WHAT CAN BE DONE IF I HAVE AMD?

90% OF AMD IS THE 'DRY' FORM (NO SWELLING OR BLEEDING) – THE AGE-RELATED EYE DISEASE STUDY (AREDS) SHOWED THAT ANTI-OXIDANT SUPPLEMENTS CAN SLOW THE PROGRESSION OF AMD; BE SURE TO ASK YOUR OPTOMETRIST IF YOU ARE A CANDIDATE FOR THIS TREATMENT.

10% OF AMD IS 'WET', INVOLVING NEW BLOOD VESSEL GROWTH AND BLEEDING. UNTIL RECENTLY, THE ONLY TREATMENT USED LASER ENERGY TO 'SPOT WELD' LEAKY VESSELS. NEW TREATMENTS USE 'COOL' LASER ENERGY AND MEDICATIONS TO STOP BLOOD VESSEL GROWTH, AND OFFER THE POTENTIAL TO ACTUALLY REGAIN VISION ALREADY LOST.

THE BEST RESULTS ARE ALWAYS OBTAINED WITH EARLY DIAGNOSIS, MAKING REGULAR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS CRITICAL FOR ANYONE AT RISK.