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Steps you can take that may reduce the chance you will have macular degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration, called AMD, is the leading cause of blindness for Americans over 65 years of age.

While AMD is already a significant issue – a 2010 study found that as many as 9.1 million Americans suffer from the condition – it is expected to become an even more pervasive problem. It is estimated that as many as 18 million people will have AMD by 2050, as baby boomers continue to age across the country.

Certainly, this should be of concern to anyone. Although there is no proven way to prevent AMD, there are a number of steps people can take that may help reduce the chance they will be affected.

With this in mind, here are five things to think about that might positively impact your longterm sight while reducing the possibility that you will have serious vision loss due to AMD:

1. Eat a healthy diet. For decades, there's been a widely held notion that eating carrots improves one's sight. As an example, a British government agency even touted how carrots helped its pilots spot German airplanes in World War II.

Although it turns out that carrots aren't a magic answer, studies have shown that people who have diets with plenty of healthy proteins, minerals and vitamins have been known to have fewer incidents of AMD. So, yes, do eat your vegetables – especially the leafy green variety. And watch your intake of saturated fat and sugar. A diet heavy in fat and sugar can increase your risk of eye disease.

2. Don't smoke, and if you smoke now, quit. In addition to a litany of other negative impacts on your health, smokers are four times more likely to develop AMD.

3. Invest in quality sunglasses. Long-term, intensive exposure to UV rays can negatively impact eyesight long-term. To help prevent this, spend the money for sunglasses that block 100 percent of UV rays and absorb most HEV (High-Energy Visible) radiation, or blue light. Also, wearing sunglasses that have a wraparound style can help protect the eyes from rays coming from all directions.

4. Exercise helps. Several recent studies have shown a correlation between regular exercise and a delay in the onset of AMD. This ties into the overall positive effects of exercise, which can help delay a number of problems that come along with aging.

5. Get an eye exam every year, without fail. Only a comprehensive dilated eye exam can spot AMD, and it is important to address AMD before there is major damage to the macula, the part of the retina that is responsible for central vision. Often, there are no symptoms present when AMD starts, so an exam is critical.

So what can you do if you learn you have AMD? Treatment methods are evolving, and a number of methods are being employed that may potentially slow the progression of the condition.

In particular, certain diet supplements through genetic testing have been shown to help slow the progression of the disease for people who have intermediate AMD.

Key questions to ask your doctor in this situation should focus on learning about the disease and how much it has progressed; talking through treatment options, and finding out if immediate changes to diet, exercise routine or other factors may be of help.

With the progress being made in slowing AMD, many seniors are finding that it doesn't have to negatively impact their quality of life. And by taking some steps before you are diagnosed with AMD, you can be doing the right thing in reducing the condition's impact as much as possible.

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