

HOPE FOR THOSE WITH AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION

John W. Rowda D.O.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of visual impairment in Caucasians over the age of 50 in the United States. Although there is currently no cure, there is hope for those with AMD.

Macular degeneration is a progressive, usually painless disease that affects the macula, the spot on the retina at the back of the eye responsible for central vision, causing central vision to blur, but leaving peripheral vision intact. Thus, AMD does not lead to total blindness.

Research continues for AMD treatments, and I think we'll see increasingly effective treatments becoming available in the near future. For example, current findings show that high levels of zinc and antioxidants can play a key role in slowing the progression of advanced AMD and that conventional laser and photodynamic therapy can reduce the risk of moderate to severe vision loss in patients with specific forms of "wet" macular degeneration. Other experimental treatments including intraocular injections of antineovascular factors and the insertion of a "retinal chip" which may restore vision loss are also currently being investigated.

For now, however, people should beware of claims being made on the Internet, in newspapers and in magazines announcing cures for macular degeneration. Investigate the claims thoroughly and talk with your ophthalmologist before undergoing any treatments. Most of these treatments have not been proven safe or effective, and may be very costly.

Currently, a specific vitamin and mineral formula has proven to slow dry AMD progression by 25%. It is available over-the-counter by several manufacturers. It is usually referred to as the "AREDS" formula. OcuVite's Preservision and I-Caps are two common brands utilizing the AREDS formula. Many other supplements are promoted but have far less scientific proof of their value.

Vision loss doesn't have to mean loss of independence or quality of life. If you have low vision, ask your ophthalmologist about low vision rehabilitation. He or she can provide low vision services or refer you to local agencies that can help.

Early detection and treatment is the best defense against losing your vision. If you are at risk for macular degeneration, see your ophthalmologist for a complete eye exam at least every one to two years.

May 2003