

Age and your eyesight

Two major causes of poor vision as we get older are cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Cataracts can normally be treated successfully by surgery, but AMD cannot be reversed. Around half of all the serious loss of sight in the UK is caused by AMD.

Risk factors

Many factors affect how likely we are to suffer AMD. Of course, we can't do anything about getting older, but there are other risk factors, including:

- smoking
- high blood pressure
- bright sunlight
- poor nutrition.

In particular, smokers are 3 to 4 times more likely to suffer from AMD than non-smokers.

Reducing the risk

A recent study (the Age-Related Eye Disease Study – AREDS) in the United States suggested that certain vitamins and minerals may help stop AMD getting worse, or may slow it down. They include vitamins A, E and C and the minerals zinc and copper. Fruit and vegetables, especially dark green leafy vegetables, are particularly good sources of these things.

Also, the level of two compounds known as Lutein and Zeaxanthin, normally found in the macular area, is reduced in AMD. Research at the University of Manchester has shown that supplements will boost these levels.

- If you smoke, then giving up smoking is the single most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of sight loss due to AMD. You can call the Stockport Stop Smoking Service on **0161 426 5085**.
- In bright light, use good-quality sunglasses.
- Eat plenty of green vegetables and fruit such as oranges, melons, apples and mangoes.
- Consider taking multi-vitamins with zinc. You can get various vitamin tablets that have been formulated specifically with AMD in mind.

Note that smokers, and recent ex-smokers, should avoid taking tablets with extra beta-carotene, as some studies have shown that it can further increase the risk of lung cancer in these people.

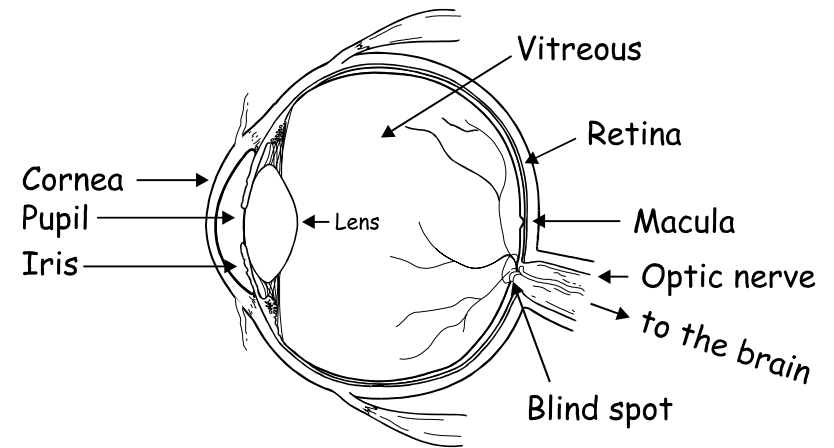
You can find more information on the ARED Study on the internet at www.nei.nih.gov/amd

Dry eyes

This is a very uncomfortable condition which is normally treated with lubricant drops or ointment. There is some evidence that eating more of certain essential fatty acids (EFAs), especially the polyunsaturated kind, can help reduce dry-eye problems. You could take flaxseed oil or cod liver oil as a dietary supplement, or eat oily fish such as sardines or mackerel 2 or 3 times each week as a natural alternative.

Nutrition and Eyesight

Patient Information Leaflet



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