

PATIENT INFORMATION · EYES

Macular degeneration

wet AMD is a two-week emergency

Age-related macular degeneration damages the central part of the retina, blurring the detailed vision used for reading and recognising faces. There are two forms. The dry form progresses slowly. **The wet form can destroy central vision within weeks — and treatment started promptly usually preserves it.**

Seek same-day eye assessment if you notice

- **straight lines appearing bent, wavy or distorted**
- **a new dark or blank patch** in the centre of your vision
- **sudden blurring** of central vision
- **a rapid change** in vision over days
- these symptoms in your **second eye** if the first is already affected

Distorted straight lines are the classic sign of wet AMD. Anti-VEGF injection treatment should begin **within two weeks** of symptoms starting to give the best chance of preserving vision. Go to an emergency eye service or optometrist the same day — do not wait for a routine appointment. Moorfields Eye Hospital runs a 24-hour walk-in emergency eye service.

The two forms

- **Dry AMD** — around 90% of cases. Gradual thinning of the macula over years, with deposits called drusen. Central vision blurs slowly. There is currently no treatment in routine UK practice, though it rarely causes complete blindness.
- **Wet AMD** — abnormal blood vessels grow under the retina and leak. Vision distorts and deteriorates over days to weeks. **This is the treatable one, and the treatable window is short.**
- Dry AMD can convert to wet at any point, which is why anyone with dry AMD must know the warning signs.

Symptoms

- **Blurred or distorted central vision** — peripheral vision is unaffected
- **Straight lines looking wavy** — door frames, window frames, text lines
- difficulty reading, recognising faces, or seeing in low light
- colours appearing less vivid
- a dark or empty patch in the middle of vision

- **It does not cause pain or redness**, and it does not cause total blindness — peripheral vision remains

Test yourself weekly with an Amsler grid

An Amsler grid is a simple square grid with a central dot, available free from the Macular Society or your optometrist. **Once a week, wearing your reading glasses, cover one eye, look at the central dot from about 30cm, and check whether any lines look wavy, broken or missing. Then repeat with the other eye.** Testing one eye at a time is essential — the good eye compensates so effectively that people lose substantial vision in one eye without noticing. This takes thirty seconds and is how wet AMD gets caught inside the treatment window.

Treatment for wet AMD

- **Anti-VEGF injections** into the eye, which stop the abnormal vessels leaking. They preserve vision in most people and improve it in a proportion.
- The eye is numbed first; the injection itself takes seconds and most people find it far less unpleasant than they expect.
- Treatment starts with monthly injections and then extends to longer intervals. **It usually continues for years** — stopping allows the vessels to leak again.
- Attending every appointment matters. Missed injections are a leading cause of vision lost despite treatment.

Reducing your risk

Do

- Stop smoking — the strongest modifiable risk factor, roughly doubling to quadrupling risk
- Eat leafy greens, oily fish and brightly coloured vegetables
- Wear sunglasses with UV protection outdoors
- Control blood pressure and cholesterol
- Have regular sight tests — free for over-60s

Worth knowing

- AREDS2 supplements benefit specific intermediate stages, not everyone — ask your ophthalmologist
- Ordinary multivitamins are not the same thing
- Some formulations containing beta-carotene are unsafe for smokers
- Family history raises risk substantially
- Screens and reading do not cause or worsen AMD

Living with it

Low vision services provide magnifiers, lighting advice, screen-reading software and rehabilitation, and are consistently under-used. Registration as sight impaired opens access to support and benefits. The Macular Society runs a free helpline on 0300 3030 111. **Peripheral vision is retained**, so most people continue to live independently — but you must inform the DVLA if AMD affects your ability to meet the driving standard.

Why come to us. If your vision has distorted, go to an emergency eye service or optometrist today — that is faster than any clinic appointment, and the two-week window matters. Where we help is with the surrounding picture: **blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes checked in-house**, structured stop-smoking support, DVLA and benefits letters, and prompt onward referral through our CQC-registered partners. We can also show you how to use an Amsler grid properly.

Risk factors managed, referral without the wait

Distorted vision needs same-day eye assessment, not an appointment.

Book an appointment

or call 020 7916 0029

Where to get help

Tower Bridge Hospital London

97–99 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DT

020 7916 0029

WhatsApp **07903 284 189**

info@mhwclinic.co.uk

Open 7 days, 9am–7pm

In an emergency

Call 999, or go to the Royal London Hospital Emergency Department, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

When we are closed and it is not an emergency

Call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk.

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Written and reviewed by Dr H Bolat, GP & Clinical Director Review date: 26 July 2026 Next review due: July 2028

Ref: TBH-PIL-250

This leaflet is based on current NHS and NICE NG82 guidance on age-related macular degeneration. It is general information and does not replace advice from a clinician who has assessed you. If your symptoms change or you are worried, contact us on 020 7916 0029, call NHS 111, or call 999 in an emergency.

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