

Ophthalmologists urge early diagnosis and treatment of age-related macular degeneration

April 3 2013

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) continues to be the leading cause of visual impairment in the United States for people over age 65, according to a study recently published online in *Ophthalmology*, the journal of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. AMD is a potentially blinding disease that affects more than 9.1 million Americans. This study, which tracked vision loss in relation to eye disease and treatment response in nearly 5,000 patients over a 20-year period, showed that despite the recent discovery of sight-saving drugs and advances in disease prevention, AMD still causes severe vision loss in approximately 15 percent of Americans 85 and older.

AMD is a disease that damages the retina, which is the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye that focuses images and relays them to the brain. Over time this [retinal damage](#) can lead to permanent loss of [central vision](#), which is essential for driving, reading and recognizing faces. Usually AMD has no early warning signs; therefore regular screening by an ophthalmologist – a medical doctor who specializes in the diagnosis, medical and surgical treatment of eye diseases – is critical to ensure early detection and treatment. The [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#) recommends that everyone obtain a baseline [eye examination](#) at age 40.

"This study paints a clearer picture of key threats to older Americans' vision, such as AMD," said Ronald Klein, M.D., the lead researcher for

the [Beaver Dam](#) Eye Study conducted at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. "It is especially relevant for health care planners, who face a tripling of the [elderly population](#) in the U.S. More people than ever will live into their seventh, eighth or ninth decades, the very years when they'll be most vulnerable to age-related eye diseases."

Good Vision Supports Seniors' Health and Well Being

Healthy vision is essential to seniors' ability to enjoy a good quality of life. From maintaining the ability to read and drive to reducing the risk of injury from falls and other accidents, keeping eyes healthy into advanced age is crucial.

After age 65, the Academy recommends eye exams every one to two years or as directed by an ophthalmologist. Many people in this age group may qualify for free or no out-of-pocket cost eye exams and treatment through EyeCare America, a public service program of the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. EyeCare America matches qualifying patients with a nearby ophthalmologist, who provides a comprehensive, dilated eye examination. EyeCare America is made possible through the generous support of the Knights Templar Foundation, Alcon and Genentech. To see if you or a loved one is eligible, visit <http://www.eyecareamerica.org>.

Hope in Sight: an AMD Resource Available at No Charge

The American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Society of Retina Specialists, an organization of ophthalmologists who specialize in AMD treatment, have partnered with Genentech to produce Hope in Sight: Living with Macular Degeneration, which features Days of our

Lives star Deirdre Hall speaking about her personal experience with her mother's AMD. The DVD is available free of charge on EyeSmart, the Academy's public information website, in English or Spanish-language versions.

Provided by American Academy of Ophthalmology

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