

Eye On Health

Americans Turning A Blind Eye To Vision Loss

(NAPSA)—More than two thirds of Americans aged 55 or older have had an eye exam in the last year to maintain their vision, yet 80 percent do not know that age-related macular degeneration, or AMD, is a leading cause of vision loss in people over 60, according to a new national survey. The survey, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation, found that only 46 percent of the 1,169 respondents could correctly identify the risk factors for this serious, progressive eye disease and just half could identify any one symptom. Of the 24 percent who are familiar with AMD, only 31 percent were aware that treatment options exist for the disease.

AMD occurs when the macula—the central portion of the retina that is important for reading and color vision—becomes damaged. There are two forms of AMD—wet and dry. All cases begin as the dry form, but 10 percent to 15 percent progress to the more serious wet form, which can result in sudden and severe central vision loss. Without treatment, central vision can be lost over time, leaving only peripheral, or side, vision.

In its early stages, AMD may not cause any noticeable symptoms. As the disease advances, symptoms may occur in one eye or both, and can include blurred vision, difficulty reading or recognizing faces, blind spots developing in the middle of the field of vision, colors becoming hard to distinguish and distortion causing edges or lines to appear wavy, according to research by the AMD Alliance and the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center.

If a person develops any of these symptoms, an eye exam is crucial and early diagnosis and treatment is essential to help avoid severe vision loss. A retina specialist



Eighty percent of adults are not aware that age-related macular degeneration, or AMD, is one of the leading causes of vision loss in people over 60. Early diagnosis of AMD can help preserve vision and slow the progression of AMD. If you are over 60, be sure to schedule regular eye exams.

should be consulted if there is a diagnosis of wet AMD, to ensure the most appropriate care.

Approximately 15 million people in the United States have AMD, and more than 1.7 million Americans have the advanced form of the disease. About 200,000 new cases of wet AMD are diagnosed each year in North America. Due to the aging baby boomer population, the National Eye Institute estimates that the prevalence of advanced AMD will grow to nearly 3 million by 2020.

The greatest risk factor for AMD is age. Other risk factors include gender (women tend to be at greater risk), race (Caucasians are more likely to lose vision from AMD) and family history. Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk of developing AMD. Several risk factors can be managed with your healthcare provider's help, including obesity and smoking.

For additional information about AMD visit www.eyeamd.org.

The AMD/Low Vision Awareness Month Omnibus Survey was commissioned by Genentech, a member of the Roche Group.