

# USING A SUN SAFETY APPROACH TO HELP PREVENT MACULAR DEGENERATION AND IMPROVE DAILY VISION

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Summer is finally here! With the longest days underway, many people are taking advantage of the warmer weather, enjoying outdoor activities and vacationing in exciting locations.

Many of your clients will use this time to communicate a message of sun safety, reminding their employees of the benefits of taking preventive measures to protect themselves from the dangerous effects of the sun. Sun-safety communication often focuses on skin protection, as most

skin cancers are caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. With sunlight as a major source of UV rays, many employees tend to only think about sun safety when they spend an extended amount of time in the sun at the beach, a pool or park. Due to sun-safety messaging traditionally focusing on cancer, many employees may not be aware that UV radiation can also cause eye conditions and diseases like cataracts and macular degeneration.

UV damage is irreversible, so your clients should make sure their sun-safety communication highlights the fact that every bit of exposure adds up. Here is some background on the leading cause of blindness, macular degeneration, as well as steps your clients can take to encourage their employees to protect their eyes in the sun.

## MACULAR DEGENERATION

Macular degeneration, also referred to as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), is the leading cause of vision loss in older adults today.<sup>1</sup> It is more common than Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, breast cancer and prostate cancer combined. This common eye condition is the gradual deterioration of the macula or "rusting" of the back of the eye, which is the part of the eye that enables the detailed, central vision needed to read and drive. Early AMD cases are expected to double by 2050, increasing to 17.8 million.<sup>2</sup>

"AMD is reaching epidemic levels and we are only in year three of a 20-year trend of 10,000 people per day turning 65 in the U.S.

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BY COMBINING EARLY DETECTION, REGULAR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS AND THE LATEST IN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROTECTION, WE CAN HELP IMPROVE EMPLOYEES' DAILY VISION AND HELP PROTECT THEIR VISION LONG TERM.

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alone. The need for coordinated, preventative care has never been stronger,” says Greg Naes, CEO of Eye Solutions Technologies. “By combining early detection, regular comprehensive exams, and the latest in internal and external protection, we can help improve an employee’s daily vision and help protect their vision long term.”

### DIAGNOSIS

During the early stages of macular degeneration, employees may not have any noticeable symptoms. AMD is typically diagnosed during a comprehensive eye exam, when an eye doctor sees yellowish spots that have accumulated under the retina. The exam may include a dilated eye exam, visual field testing, an Amsler grid test other diagnostic tools. Macular degeneration is diagnosed as one of two forms: dry (non-neovascular) or wet (neovascular). Either can progress and result in severe vision loss, impacting the employee’s quality of life.

### DRY MACULAR DEGENERATION

The result of aging and thinning of macular tissue, dry macular degeneration is the most common form, with 85% to 90% of cases diagnosed as such. This condition has three stages: early, intermediate and advanced. As this condition progresses, people may notice a change in their vision. These changes may include difficulty in recognizing faces, haziness or blurriness in the center of their field of vision, and having difficulty reading in what was previously sufficient lighting. The damage this condition causes cannot be reversed. It can impact one or both eyes. If only one eye is impacted, it is likely that no symptoms will be noticed because the healthy eye may be compensating for the eye with the condition.

### WET MACULAR DEGENERATION

Without warning, dry macular degeneration can progress to the other form of this condition, wet macular degeneration. This form occurs when new blood vessels grow beneath the retina and leak blood and fluid.

This causes permanent damage to the retina. During the early stages of wet macular degeneration, people may develop blind spots in their central vision. The loss of central vision can happen pretty quickly, but there are treatment options to help slow down the progression of vision loss, especially if it is diagnosed before significant loss occurs.

### RISK FACTORS

The risk factors for macular degeneration include aging, race, lighter eye color, high blood pressure, family history of this condition, low macular pigment, high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, prolonged exposure to UV rays and certain lifestyle choices such as smoking, obesity and inactivity.

### STEPS TO POTENTIALLY PREVENT OR SLOW PROGRESSION

Employees can take several steps to help prevent or slow the progression of this condition:

- keep informed on the latest in science and protective tools by visiting [www.maculardegenerationeducation.org](http://www.maculardegenerationeducation.org)
- wear sunglasses that block UV and filter and a wide-brim hat to protect eyes from damaging UV rays
- manage other diseases by following doctor’s orders to help keep them under control
- exercise to maintain a healthy weight
- maintain a diet rich with eye-nurturing nutrients such as green leafy vegetables (lutein), sunflower seeds and almonds (vitamin E), flaxseed oil and fatty fish (Omega-3) as well as pumpkin seeds and oysters (zinc)
- consider nutritional supplements containing the three protecting pigments found in the eye (lutein, zeaxanthin, and meso-zeaxanthin)
- avoid smoking
- have routine, comprehensive eye exams, working with their eye doctor to determine frequency.

### SUN SAFETY

Sun-safety messaging that also incorporates eye protection by recommending employees wear sunglasses with 100% UV protection along with a large-brim hat and have routine eye exams is a great way for your clients to expand the traditional focus.

Comprehensive eye exams enable eye doctors to detect early signs of macular degeneration along with other conditions and diseases before employees receive a definitive diagnosis from their primary care physician. With early detection, employees may be able to save money on potentially more serious medical expenses. Employees need to be aware that, even without symptoms, the damaging effects of UV rays may already be underway and comprehensive eye exams are the primary method to determine the severity of the damage. Vision insurance can make comprehensive eye exams more affordable for employees. Most vision plans provide coverage for routine eye exams and some even offer discounts on 100% UV protection sunglasses or lenses.

Summer is a great time to help your clients refresh their sun-safety messaging and communication. Poor vision is directly correlated to decreased productivity. By increasing the awareness of preventive measures that can protect and maintain eyesight, your clients will be taking solid steps to assist with maintaining and/or increasing the productivity of their employees. Encouraging employees to give their eyes the quality protection they deserve will ultimately help them to enjoy this season and more for years to come. **HIU**

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The State of Vision, Aging, and Public Health in America. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Rein DB, Wittenborn JS, Zhang X, Honeycutt AA, Lesesne SB, Saaddine J. Forecasting age-related macular degeneration through the year 2050: the potential impact of new treatments. *Archives of Ophthalmology* 2009; 127(4):533–540.11 Pear; Feb. 17, 2013.