

## February is American Heart Month and Eye Related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month

February is known as American Heart Month, and it's a time designed to raise awareness about cardiovascular health. It's an important subject to observe because heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the U.S., and a person dies from this disease every 36 seconds. That results in almost 700,000 people dying from heart disease in the country, which accounts for 1 in every 4 deaths. While genetics might play a role in these deaths, lifestyle is a contributing factor that Americans can control to improve their health and lower their risk of a major heart attack.

**Heart disease** is the leading cause of death in the United States. The term "heart disease" refers to several types of heart conditions. The most common type of heart disease in the United States is coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD affects the blood flow to the heart. Decreased blood flow can cause a heart attack.

**Symptoms** - Sometimes heart disease may be "silent" and not diagnosed until a person experiences signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia. When these events happen, symptoms may include: 1) Heart attack: Chest pain or discomfort, upper back or neck pain, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, extreme fatigue, dizziness, and shortness of breath. 2) Arrhythmia: Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations). 3) Heart failure: Shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck veins.

**Risk factors** - High blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease. About half of people in the United States (47%) have at least one of these three risk factors.<sup>2</sup> Several other medical conditions and lifestyle choices can also put people at a higher risk for heart disease, including Diabetes, Overweight and obesity, Unhealthy diet, Physical inactivity, and Excessive alcohol use

**Treatment and recovery** - Cardiac rehabilitation is an important program for anyone recovering from a heart attack. This can also include heart failure, or some types of heart surgery. Cardiac rehabilitation is a supervised program that includes: Physical activity, Education about healthy eating, Taking medicine as prescribed., Ways to help you quit smoking, Counseling to find ways to relieve stress and improve mental health. A team of people may help you through cardiac rehabilitation. This may include Your health care team, Exercise and nutrition specialists, Physical therapists, and Counselors or mental health professionals.

**ABCS of Heart Health** - Every year, Americans suffer more than 1.5 million heart attacks and strokes.

The good news is that you can help reduce your risk and improve your heart health by following the ABCS!

**A:** Take **aspirin** as directed by your health care professional. Ask your health care professional if aspirin can reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

**B:** Control your **blood pressure**. Blood pressure measures the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. If your blood pressure stays high for a long time, you may suffer from high blood pressure (also called hypertension). High blood pressure increases your risk for heart attack or stroke more than any other risk factor.

**C:** Manage your **cholesterol**. Cholesterol is a waxy substance produced by the liver and found in certain foods. Your body needs cholesterol, but when you have too much, it can build up in your arteries and cause heart disease. There are different types of cholesterol: One type is "good" and can protect you from heart disease, but another type is "bad" and can increase your risk.

**S:** Don't smoke. **Smoking** raises your blood pressure, which increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. If you smoke, quit. Talk with your health care professional about ways to help you stick with your decision. It's never too late to quit smoking.

**Eye Related Macular Degeneration** (AMD) or Macular degeneration is a progressive eye condition affecting as many as 15 million Americans. The disease attacks the macula of the eye, where our sharpest central vision occurs, affecting reading, driving, identifying faces, watching television, safely navigating stairs

and performing other daily tasks. Although it rarely results in complete blindness, it robs the individual of all but the outermost, peripheral vision, leaving only dim images or black holes at the center of vision. As the disease progresses the area of color and central vision deteriorates and the gradual destruction of light sensitive cells continues until large areas are totally gone. Peripheral vision remains, but the ability to clearly see straight ahead and to see color is lost. There is no cure for AMD.

AMD is the number one cause of severe vision loss and legal blindness in adults over 60 in the U.S. As many as 15 million Americans and millions more worldwide have signs of AMD 200,000 new cases of AMD are diagnosed each year in the United States. As the “baby boomers” advance into their 60’s and 70’s, it will reach epidemic proportions. 14%-24% of the U.S. population aged 65-74 years and 35-40% of people aged 75 years or more have the disease.

There are two types of AMD – “wet” or neovascular and “dry” or atrophic. For people with wet macular degeneration, there are several treatment options and more are being developed, aimed at either sealing off the leaking blood vessels (with a laser and light sensitive drug) and/or preventing the blood vessels from growing back (called anti-angiogenic therapies). Repeated treatments are needed and will be determined on an individual basis by your doctor. Some can be as often as once a month, but doctors are now finding that treatments can be spaced further apart and still be effective. Early detection and treatment is important for good results of any therapy for wet macular degeneration. The goal is to stop or slow the progression of wet AMD. While it is possible to restore some vision in patients treated early, none of the therapies can restore vision in an eye with scarring. There are currently no medical treatments for dry macular degeneration, but research is underway to find treatments for dry AMD, which affect 90% of the people with AMD.

If you have macular degeneration, a family history of AMD, or are in the “macular generation” (age 60 or above), you should be particularly attentive to controlling your risk factors. Since AMD can be genetic, relatives should also follow these guidelines: Stop smoking. The risk of AMD is at least 7 times higher for smokers. Eat a healthy diet high in fruits and vegetables, containing fish, and low in saturated fats, Control high blood pressure and cholesterol, Cardiovascular exercise. Get some exercise and maintain a healthy weight. Consider vitamin supplementation. A long-term study on age-related eye disease and vitamins found that a combination of antioxidants and zinc could reduce the progression of vision loss. Ask your doctor if vitamins are an appropriate treatment for you. Protect your eyes from harmful sunlight. Wear sunglasses and a hat or visor.

For more information contact:

#AmericanHeartMonth

[www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov)

<https://discoveryeye.org>

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