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71,000 OLDER OHIOANS HAVE MACULAR DEGENERATION Diet Rich in Antioxidants Helps, Diet High in Fat Hinders

COLUMBUS – According to Prevent Blindness Ohio’s *Vision Problems in Ohio* report, 71,000 Ohioans and 1.65 million Americans age 50 and older have advanced stages of AMD, and this number is expected to **double** by 2030. Worldwide, as many as 30 million people have AMD in various stages. Although the disease can affect younger people, it is much more common among older adults.

AMD robs people of their central vision and often, the ability to read a book, recognize a face, see fine details, and distinguish some colors.

The exact cause of AMD is unknown, but risk factors for the disease include age, being Caucasian, diets high in fat content, and smoking.

Eating fatty, processed baked goods has been shown to worsen the early stages of AMD. Conversely, research suggests that diets rich in certain antioxidants, including lutein and zeaxanthin can help protect your eyes against AMD. Foods rich in lutein include spinach, kale, broccoli, collard greens. Zeaxanthin is found in fruits and vegetables with yellow hues, such as corn, peaches, persimmons, mangoes.

“Mom’s adage to eat your spinach was wise advice,” said Sherill K. Williams, president and CEO.

“Harvard researchers found that one or both of these antioxidants work by absorbing the blue light from the sun before it can damage the retina,” Williams added.

One treatment that holds some promise is the artificial retina, which has been implanted successfully in several test subjects. This treatment is still experimental. Although there is no cure, these and other research studies hold great future promise for millions of people suffering from AMD. However, there are steps that you can take **now** to reduce the risk of developing the disease and/or slowing the progression.

A recent study by the National Eye Institute suggests that specific, high doses of zinc, vitamins C and E, and beta carotene may help slow the progression of AMD. The benefits of the nutrients were seen only in people who were at high risk of developing advanced AMD, those with intermediate AMD in one or both eyes, and advanced AMD in *one eye only*. As with any treatment, it is best to consult with an eye doctor.

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Recently, a gene was identified by researchers at Oregon Health & Science University that they suspect is the main cause of many cases of AMD. Further studies must be done, but if the gene proves to be the cause, gene therapy *may* help delay or even prevent the disease.

There are two forms of AMD: "dry" and "wet". Dry AMD is the most common form of the disease. It involves the presence of drusen – fatty deposits that form under the light-sensing cells in the retina in the back of the eye. Vision loss in the early stages of dry AMD is usually moderate and progresses slowly. Wet AMD is less common, but more threatening to vision. Wet AMD causes tiny blood vessels under the retina to leak or break open. This distorts vision and causes scar tissue to form. Laser therapies can be effective in controlling the advances of wet AMD, but are ineffective in treating dry AMD.

The following are some signs of AMD:

- Straight lines such as telephone poles, the sides of buildings or streetlight poles, look wavy.
- Written text and/or type can appear blurry.
- A dark or empty spot may block the center of your vision.

If you notice any of these changes, schedule a dilated eye exam as soon as possible. To receive a free home test for AMD download an Age-Related Macular Degeneration Test at www.preventblindness.org or call 1-800-301-2020 for free brochures and fact sheets on AMD.

Prevent Blindness Ohio, founded in 1957, is the only voluntary, not-for-profit health organization dedicated to preventing blindness and preserving sight. It serves all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to more than 300,000 Ohioans annually and educating millions of consumers about what they can do to protect and preserve their precious gift of sight. Prevent Blindness Ohio is an affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, the country's second-oldest national voluntary health organization. Visit our website at www.preventblindness.org/ohio or call 800-301-2020 for more information.

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