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1.65 MILLION OLDER AMERICANS HAVE MACULAR DEGENERATION Diet Can Help – Mom’s Old Adage to Eat Your Spinach Wise Advice

SCHAUMBURG, Ill – An astounding 80 million Americans are at risk of developing potentially blinding eye diseases, including age-related macular degeneration (AMD). According to Prevent Blindness America's (PBA's) *Vision Problems in the U.S* report, 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. 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. 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 exact cause of AMD is unknown, but risk factors for the disease include age, being Caucasian, diets high in fat content, and smoking. 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.

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

It has been shown that early stages of AMD can worsen by eating fatty, processed baked goods. Conversely, research suggests that diets rich in certain antioxidants, including lutein and zeaxanthin can help protect your eyes against AMD. "Mom's old adage to eat your spinach was wise advice," said Daniel D. Garrett, PBA spokesperson. "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," Garrett added.

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A recent study by the National Eye Institute suggests that pharmacological-level 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 those with advanced AMD in one eye only.

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 free brochures and fact sheets on AMD, call the PBA Consumer and Patient Information Hotline at 1-800-331-2020.**

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For free information or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the web at www.preventblindness.org.

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