



In this edition

- Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)
- Vision Awareness
- National Children Dental health
- Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month



February is AMD / Low Vision Awareness Month

What is AMD?

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is an eye disease that can blur your central vision. It happens when aging causes damage to the macula — the part of the eye that controls sharp, straight-ahead vision. The macula is part of the retina (the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye).

AMD is a common condition — it's a leading cause of vision loss for older adults. AMD doesn't cause complete blindness, but losing your central vision can make it harder to see faces, read, drive, or do close-up work like cooking or fixing things around the house.

AMD happens very slowly in some people and faster in others. If you have early AMD, you may not notice vision loss for a long time. That's why it's important to get regular eye exams to find out if you have AMD.

What are the types and stages of AMD?

There are **2 types of AMD**: dry and wet.

Most people with AMD have **dry AMD** (also called atrophic AMD). This is when the macula gets thinner with age. Dry AMD happens in **3 stages**: early, intermediate, and late. It usually progresses slowly over several years. There's no treatment for late dry AMD, but you can find ways to make the most of your remaining vision. And if you have late dry AMD in only 1 eye, you can take steps to protect your other eye.

Wet AMD (also called advanced neovascular AMD), is a less common type of late AMD that usually causes faster vision loss. Any stage of dry AMD can turn into wet AMD — but wet AMD is always late stage. It happens when abnormal blood vessels grow in the back of the eye and damage the macula. The good news is that treatment options are available for wet AMD.

What are the symptoms of AMD?

The symptoms of AMD depend on the stage. Dry AMD happens in 3 stages: early, intermediate, and late. AMD is a progressive disease — that means symptoms usually get worse over time.

- **Early dry AMD** doesn't cause any symptoms.
- In **intermediate dry AMD**, some people still have no symptoms. Others may notice mild symptoms, like mild blurriness in their central vision or trouble seeing in low lighting.
- In **late AMD (wet or dry type)**, many people notice that straight lines start to look wavy or crooked. You may also notice a blurry area near the centre of your vision. Over time, this blurry area may get bigger or you may see blank spots. Colors may also seem less bright than before, and you may have more trouble seeing in low lighting. Colors may also seem less bright than before, and you may have more trouble seeing in low lighting.

Straight lines looking wavy is a warning sign for late AMD. If you notice this symptom, see your eye doctor right away.

Am I at risk for AMD?

Your risk for AMD increases as you get older. People age 55 and older are more likely to have AMD. The risk for AMD is also higher for people who:

- Have a family history of AMD
- Are Caucasian
- Smoke

If you're at risk for AMD because of your age, family history, or other factors, it's important to get regular eye exams. Ask your doctor how often you need to get eye exams. Early AMD doesn't have any symptoms, so don't wait for your vision to change!

How can I lower my risk for AMD?

Research shows that you may be able to lower your risk of AMD (or slow vision loss from AMD) by making these healthy choices:

- Quit smoking — or don't start
- Get regular physical activity
- Maintain healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Eat healthy foods, including leafy green vegetables and fish

How will my eye doctor check for AMD?

Eye doctors can check for AMD as part of a comprehensive dilated eye exam. The exam is simple and painless — your doctor will give you some eye drops to dilate (widen) your pupil and then check your eyes for AMD and other eye problems.

Your doctor may also recommend doing a test called optical coherence tomography (OCT). In an OCT test, your eye doctor will take pictures of the inside of your eye with a special machine.

What's the treatment for AMD?

Treatment for AMD depends on the stage and type. There's currently no treatment for early AMD, so your eye doctor will probably just keep track of how your eyes are doing with regular eye exams. Eating healthy, getting regular exercise, and quitting smoking can also help.

If you have intermediate AMD in 1 or both eyes, special dietary supplements (vitamins and minerals) may be able to stop it from turning into late AMD. If you have late AMD in only 1 eye, these supplements may slow down AMD in your other eye.

If you have wet AMD, there are other treatments that may be able to stop further vision loss:

- Medicines called anti-VEGF drugs that the doctor injects in your eye
- Photodynamic therapy (PDT), a combination of injections and laser treatment
- There's currently no treatment for late dry AMD — but researchers are hard at work looking for treatment options. And you can get support to help you live with vision loss from AMD.

How do I live with vision loss from AMD?

Not everyone with AMD develops late AMD or gets it in both eyes. But if you do, living with vision loss from AMD can be challenging. Having low vision means that even with glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, your vision loss makes it hard to do everyday tasks.

The good news is, there are things that can help — like low vision devices and vision rehab services. Vision rehab can help you learn the skills you need to stay independent and active with low vision.

[Source: Age-Related Macular Degeneration \(AMD\) | National Eye Institute \(nih.gov\) Accessed 19 Jan 24](#)

Vision Awareness

How to keep your Eyes Healthy - Don't take your eyes for granted. Take these easy steps to keep your peepers healthy.

1. Eat Well

Good eye health starts with the food on your plate. Nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, lutein, zinc, and vitamins C and E might help ward off age-related vision problems like macular degeneration and cataracts. To get them, fill your plate with:

- Green leafy vegetables like spinach, kale, and collards
- Salmon, tuna, and other oily fish
- Eggs, nuts, beans, and other nonmeat protein sources
- Oranges and other citrus fruits or juices
- Oysters and pork

A well-balanced diet also helps you stay at a healthy weight. That lowers your odds of obesity and related diseases [like type 2 diabetes](#), which is the leading cause of blindness in adults.



2. Quit Smoking

It makes you more likely to get cataracts, damage to your optic nerve, and macular degeneration, among many other medical problems. If you've tried to kick the habit before only to start again, keep at it. The more times you try to quit, the more likely you are to succeed. Ask your doctor for help.

Vision Awareness continued...

3. Wear Sunglasses

The right pair of shades will help protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Too much UV exposure boosts your chances of cataracts and macular degeneration.

Choose a pair that blocks 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB rays. Wraparound lenses help protect your eyes from the side. Polarized lenses reduce glare while you drive, but don't necessarily offer added protection.

If you wear contact lenses, some offer UV protection. It's still a good idea to wear sunglasses for an extra layer.

4. Use Safety Eyewear

If you use hazardous or airborne materials on the job or at home, wear safety glasses or protective goggles.

Sports like ice hockey, racquetball, and lacrosse can also lead to eye injury. Wear eye protection. Helmets with protective face masks or sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses will shield your eyes.

5. Look Away from the Computer Screen

Staring at a computer or phone screen for too long can cause:

- Eyestrain
- Blurry vision
- Trouble focusing at a distance
- Dry eyes
- Headaches
- Neck, back, and shoulder pain

To protect your eyes:

- Make sure your glasses or contacts prescription is up to date and good for looking at a computer screen.
- If your eye strain won't go away, talk to your doctor about computer glasses.
- Move the screen so your eyes are level with the top of the monitor. That lets you look slightly down at the screen.
- Try to avoid glare from windows and lights. Use an anti-glare screen if needed.
- Choose a comfortable, supportive chair. Position it so that your feet are flat on the floor.
- If your eyes are dry, blink more or try using artificial tears.
- Rest your eyes every 20 minutes. Look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Get up at least every 2 hours and take a 15-minute break.
- [RELATED: Try This Test to See if You Need Reading Glasses](#)

6. Visit Your Eye Doctor Regularly

Everyone needs a regular eye exam, even young children. It helps protect your sight and lets you see your best. Eye exams can also find diseases, like glaucoma, that have no symptoms.

It's important to spot them early on, when they're easier to treat.

Depending on your eye health needs, you can see one of two types of doctors:

- Ophthalmologists are medical doctors who specialize in eye care. They can provide general eye care, treat eye diseases, and perform eye surgery.
- Optometrists have had 4 years of specialized training after college. They provide general eye care and can diagnose and treat most eye diseases. They don't do eye surgery.

A comprehensive eye exam might include:

- Talking about your personal and family medical history
- [Vision tests](#) to see if you're near-sighted, farsighted, have an [astigmatism](#) (a curved [cornea](#) that blurs vision), or presbyopia (age-related vision changes)
- Tests to see how well your eyes work together
- Eye pressure and optic nerve tests to check for [glaucoma](#)
- External and microscopic examination of your eyes before and after dilation

You might also need other tests.

[Source: 6 Tips for Eye Health and Maintaining Good Eyesight \(webmd.com\) accessed 20 Jan 24](#)



National Children Dental health

February is National Children's Dental Health Month. Cavities, also known as caries or tooth decay, are the most common chronic disease of childhood, yet cavities are preventable. Children who have poor oral health often miss more school and receive lower grades than children who don't. Learn how you can protect your child's teeth from cavities with these resources.

Untreated cavities can cause pain, infections, and can lead to problems eating, speaking, and learning. More than 1 in 5 children aged 2 to 5 years has at least one cavity in their baby teeth. Children from low-income families are more than twice as likely to have untreated cavities, compared with children from higher-income households. However, cavities are preventable. You can protect and maintain your child's teeth by following these wise simple steps below:

P-E-A-R-L-S of Wisdom

Protect tiny teeth by caring for your mouth when you're pregnant. Your child's future oral health starts with you.

Ensure to wipe your baby's gums after each meal.

Avoid putting babies to bed with a bottle.

Remember to brush your child's teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste. For children younger than 2 years, consult with your dentist or doctor about when to start using fluoride toothpaste.

Limit drinks and food with added sugars for children. Encourage your child to eat more fruits and vegetables and have fewer fruit drinks, cookies, and candies. This gives your child the best possible start to good oral health.

Schedule your child's first dental visit by their first birthday or after their first tooth appears. Their tiny teeth matter!

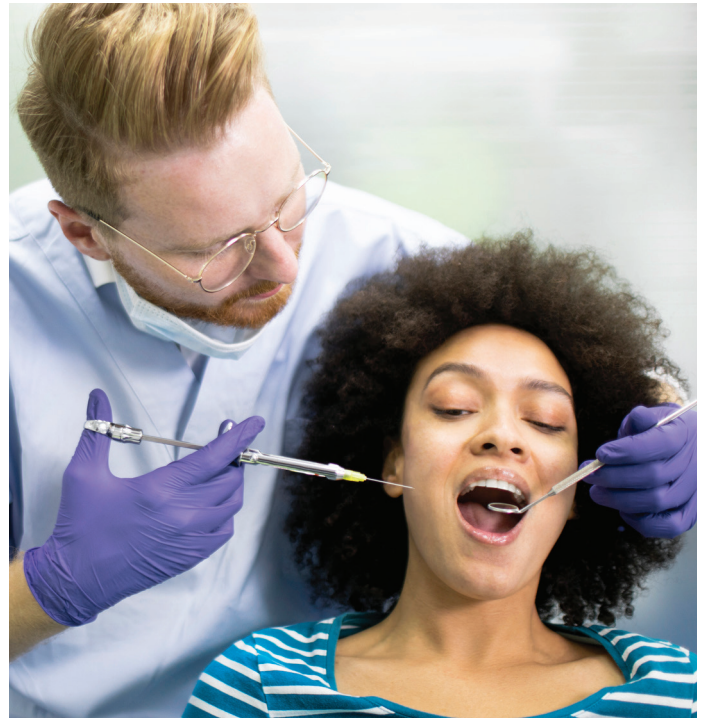
Root of It All: Are You Watching What Your Child Eats and Drinks?

Your child's diet is very important for developing and maintaining strong and healthy teeth. It is helpful to include good sources of calcium (yogurt, broccoli, and milk) to your child's diet to help build strong teeth. Teaching your child about healthy eating habits is one of the best practices for a lifetime of good health. Here are some helpful tips:

- Eat fruits and vegetables for snacks rather than candies and cookies.
- Brush your child's teeth twice daily.
- Serve water at mealtime rather than juice or soda.

Did You Know That Community Water Fluoridation Saves Money and Teeth?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring element in water. Community water fluoridation is the process of adjusting the amount of



fluoride found in water to achieve the best prevention of tooth decay.

- Bacteria in the mouth produce acid when a person eats sugary foods. This acid eats away minerals from the tooth's surface, making the tooth weaker and increasing the chance of developing cavities.
- Drinking tap water with fluoride rebuilds the surface of the tooth. By keeping the tooth strong and solid, fluoride protects teeth from decay.
- Community water fluoridation has been shown to save money, both for families and the health care system.
- Check if your water has fluoride by visiting [My Water's Fluoride](#).

School Dental Sealant Programs: A Hidden Gem

Dental sealants are a quick, easy, and painless way to prevent most cavities children get in the permanent back teeth where 9 in 10 cavities occur. Children aged 6 to 11 years without sealants have almost 3 times more first-molar cavities than children with sealants.

School dental sealant programs are an effective way to deliver this highly effective preventive intervention to millions of children who might not receive regular dental care. Increasing sealant use among low-income children can greatly reduce tooth decay.

As a parent, ask your child's dentist to apply sealants when appropriate. If your child's school has a sealant program, sign your child up to participate. If they don't, ask your child's school to start one.

[Source: Children's Dental Health \(cdc.gov\) Accessed 23 Jan 24](#)

Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month

10 Healthy choices to make in 2024

Meaningful, small changes can have a big impact on your overall health and well-being. In 2024, commit to taking small steps to change your daily routines and habits to benefit your health.

1. Eat a healthy diet

What a [healthy diet](#) looks like may differ from person to person, depending on your culture, where you live and what food is locally available. Yet, the principles are the same – making informed choices can help you improve the way you eat. Cutting down on foods high in salt, free sugars, saturated fats and trans-fatty acids may sound overwhelming at first, but easy steps add up – such as swapping a lunchtime soda for water. Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruits and vegetables every day. Think about a balanced and diversified diet, and keep fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts in mind as you plan your daily meals. [Read WHO healthy diet recommendations.](#)



2. Be active

Being active every day can be challenging, but did you know that every move counts? Adding a walk after a meal, sweeping floors or taking the stairs can all help your cardiovascular health. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week if you are an adult. For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate-intensity physical activity to 300 minutes per week or the equivalent. If you have children or teenagers, be active together and help them reach their 60 minutes of exercise per day.

There can be many environmental or mental barriers to physical activity, but always remember physical activity has significant health benefits for hearts, bodies and minds.

3. Avoid harmful use of alcohol

Did you know that [alcohol consumption](#) is a contributor to more than 200 diseases, injuries, and other health conditions? Alcohol consumption increases your risk of injury, as well as longer-term effects like liver damage, cancer, heart disease and mental illness. Any level of alcohol consumption carries risk. If you drink alcohol, you may wish to discuss your alcohol consumption with a health-care professional. [Learn more about alcohol in the Western Pacific.](#)

4. Don't use tobacco or vape

The [benefits of quitting tobacco](#) begin as quickly as 20 minutes after the last cigarette. Any tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke is harmful. Quitting tobacco reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other diseases.

Quitting vaping can also be part of the step towards a healthier you. E-cigarettes are harmful to your health and have long-term consequences, especially for young people, because users are exposed to nicotine and other harmful chemicals.

[Commit to quit. There is help to get you started on your quitting journey today.](#)



5. Look out for your sexual health

[Sexual health](#) is essential for a healthy life. Sex is much more than just physical connection – it's about respect, pleasure and safety. Sexual activities involving other partners require explicit consent and should be free from coercion, discrimination and violence. It's also important to be safe during sex! Using condoms during sexual activity can help prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unplanned pregnancies and HIV.

Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month continued...

6. Connect in person to support your mental health

[Loneliness](#) is a serious health risk. A large body of research shows that social isolation and loneliness have a serious impact on physical and mental health, quality of life and longevity. Face-to-face or digital contact with friends or family can help you form meaningful social connections.

It's also important to be kind to yourself and [practise good mental health habits](#), to help manage any mental health conditions or stressful situations in your daily life.



7. Get vaccinated

Make sure you and your family are up-to-date with routine vaccinations. Vaccines reduce the risks of getting a disease by working with your body's natural defences to build protection. If you have children who missed out on essential vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, check with your health provider to help them catch up and protect their health.

We now have vaccines to prevent more than 20 life-threatening diseases, helping people of all ages live longer, healthier lives. [Read more on vaccines and immunization.](#)

8. Take antimicrobials the right way

Bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites have changed over time and some no longer respond to medicines. Antimicrobial resistance makes infections harder or sometimes impossible to treat, increasing the risk of diseases spreading, severe illness and death. To do your part in combating antimicrobial resistance, take antibiotics and other antimicrobials only if prescribed by your health provider, complete your treatment days and don't share leftover antibiotics with others. Don't ask for antibiotics to treat common colds and flu – antibiotics won't work against viral infections. [Learn more about how WHO is combating antimicrobial resistance.](#)

9. Wash your hands

Clean hands help stop the spread of infections. Make sure you wash your hands the right way using soap and water or an alcohol-based rub. [Get more handwashing tips.](#)

10. Get regular check-ups

See your health provider for regular, yearly check-ups. These visits can help you monitor your blood pressure to control and prevent [hypertension](#) – the number one silent killer in the world. Many people don't know they have hypertension and without proper treatment, uncontrolled hypertension can lead to severe health complications later in life.

Regular check-ups with your health provider will also help you keep track of your health status if you're at risk for hepatitis, HIV, tuberculosis or STIs.

Essential tests, such as those measuring your cardiovascular health or sugar levels, can help with diagnosis and management of noncommunicable diseases like heart disease or diabetes early on. For women and men, health screenings like pap smears or prostate exams, respectively, can help detect cancer. Check with your health provider to find out which tests or screenings you need. [Learn more about noncommunicable diseases..](#)

Let's all choose to be healthier in 2024!

[Source: Ten healthy choices to make in 2024 \(who.int\)](#)
[Accessed 23 January 24](#)



Aon Employee Benefits Consulting

We focus on Communication and Engagement, across Insurance, Retirement and Health, to Advise and Deliver solutions that create great Client Impact. We partner with our clients and seek solutions for their most important people and HR challenges.

Aon Resolution Centre (ARC)

If you do not get satisfactory assistance from your medical scheme, please do not hesitate to contact your allocated Aon Employee Benefits Healthcare Consultant or the **Aon Resolution Centre (ARC) on 0860 100 404**. Please remember to get a reference number from your medical scheme when escalating your query to the Aon Resolution Centre (ARC).

Don't be left exposed. Get Gap Cover today.

Gap cover policy gives you peace of mind and may cover the unexpected in-hospital shortfalls, out of hospital co-payment and deductibles which are not covered by your medical scheme, that may compromise you financially. The medical schemes shortfalls are a result of medical practitioners such as Anaesthetists, Surgeons and other Specialists charging more than the medical scheme rate, which you as a member are liable for.

We are pleased to inform you that Aon has negotiated a favourable underwriting window period with some Gap Cover providers for you and your family. Please contact Aon on 0860 100 404 or arc@aon.co.za for further information. You may also contact the Aon Resolution Centre should you require a comparison between your current provider and other Gap cover providers.

This is not a medical scheme and the cover is not the same as that of a medical scheme. This policy is not a substitute for medical scheme membership.

Household and Motor Insurance

Aon also provides Household and Motor Insurance. If you would like to know more send an e-mail to: quoteme@aon.co.za or call us 0860 100 404.

Disclaimer:

Aon South Africa (Pty) Ltd is an Authorised Financial Services Provider, FSP 20555

The content hereof is intended for informational and educational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Although we take efforts to ensure that the medical information is up to date, we cannot guarantee that the content reflects the most up-to-date research. Whilst we have made every attempt to source the most reliable information for distribution and awareness of our clients, we confirm that the information in the attached brochure should not be construed as medical advice and recommend that you consult a medical practitioner to discuss your concerns and confirm a diagnosis. This document has been compiled using information available to us at date of publication.

Connect with us:

We focus on communication and engagement, across insurance retirement and health, to advise and deliver solutions that create great client impact. We partner with our client and seek solutions for their most important people and HR challenges. We have an established presence on social media to engage with our audiences on all matters related to risk and people.

For more information from Aon Employee Benefits on healthcare, retirement benefits and a wide range of topics feel free to go to www.aon.co.za



<https://www.facebook.com/AonSouthAfrica/>
Click "Like" on our page (Aon healthcare)



http://twitter.com/Aon_SouthAfrica
Click "follow" on our profile

Aon Employee Benefits – Healthcare

Aon South Africa Pty Ltd, an Authorised Financial Service Provider, FSP # 20555.

<https://www.aon.co.za/legal/disclaimer>

On all services provided, Aon's Terms & Conditions of Business, as amended from time to time, are applicable and can be found at <http://www.aon.co.za/terms-of-trade> or will be sent to you upon request.

<https://www.aon.co.za/legal/privacy-notice/>

Copyright© 2023. Aon SA (Pty) Ltd.
All rights reserved.

29 January 2024 | V1 | MM