

Driving When You Have Macular Degeneration

You have been a safe driver for years. For you, driving means freedom and control. As you get older, changes in your physical and mental health can affect how safely you drive.

Macular degeneration (also known as age-related macular degeneration) damages the macula, a spot near the center of the retina (light-sensitive inner lining of the eyeball). It is a common eye problem among older drivers that makes it hard to drive safely. Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in people 65 and older.

If you have macular degeneration, you may not notice any signs in the early stages. You may not know you have this condition until you lose your peripheral vision (what you see out of the corner of your eyes). In time it will affect your central vision, causing a dark or empty area in the center of your vision.

How Can Macular Degeneration Affect the Way I Drive?

- Your central vision may be dull and blurry. This can lead to loss of sharp vision.
- You may not see the road, street signs, lane markers, and even people and bicyclists in the road.
- You may need more bright light to see up close.
- Colors may look less vivid or bright.
- You may have trouble when you go from bright light to low light.
- You may not be able to recognize people's faces.

What Should I Do if I Have Any of These Signs?

As soon as you notice any of these warning signs:

- Tell your family or someone close to you, especially if you have a family history of macular degeneration or have changes in your central vision.
- See your eye health care provider.

Early diagnosis of age-related macular degeneration is important. Once it is diagnosed, you and your family can work with your eye health care provider to determine next steps. Regular eye exams and the best treatment for you may help you avoid preventable vision loss.

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What Can I Do When Macular Degeneration Affects My Driving Safety?

It is important to know how macular degeneration is changing your driving safety. Your health care provider may suggest that you see a specialist to help you adjust to these changes.

Two types of specialists can help you:

- ***A driver rehabilitation specialist*** can test how well you drive on and off the road. This specialist also can help you decide when you need to stop driving. To find a driver rehabilitation specialist, go to www.aota.org/olderdriver. Under “Driving & Community Mobility,” click the button in the center of the page marked “Search for a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist.” This will link you to a national database. There you can search for names and addresses of local driver rehabilitation specialists.
- ***An occupational therapist with special training in driving skills assessment and remediation.*** To find an occupational therapist, contact local hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

What Can I Do If I Have to Limit or Stop Driving?

If you have macular degeneration, you may still be able to drive safely during the early stages. Your eye health care provider will tell you what to do to manage your symptoms so you can stay safe on the road.

Even if you have to limit or give up driving, you can stay active and do the things you like to do.

First, plan ahead. Talk with family and friends about how you can shift from driver to passenger. Below are some ways to get where you want to go and see the people you want to see:

- Rides with family and friends.
- Taxis.
- Shuttle buses or vans.
- Public buses, trains, and subways.
- Walking.
- Para transit services (special transportation services for people with disabilities; some offer door-to-door service).

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Take someone with you. You may want to have a family member or friend go with you when you use public transportation or when you walk. Having someone with you can help you get where you want to go without confusion.

Find out about transportation services in your area. Many community-based volunteer programs offer free or low-cost transportation.

Where Can I Get Help With Transportation?

To find transportation services in your area, visit www.eldercare.gov or call the national ElderCare Locator at **800-677-1116**, and ask for your local Office on Aging.

If you have a disability, check out Easter Seals Project ACTION at www.projectaction.org or call **800-659-6428**. This project works with the transportation industry and the disability community to give people with disabilities more ways to get around.

Where Can I Learn More About Macular Degeneration?

First, talk with your eye health care provider.

For more information, contact:

- **AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY:** www.aao.org, 415-447-0213
- **AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION:** www.aoa.org, 800-365-221
- **NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE**, National Institutes of Health: www.nei.nih.gov, 301-496-5248
- **NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE**, National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/maculardegeneration.html
- To order a free copy of *Age Page on Older Drivers*, call the National Institute on Aging at 800-222-2225, or go to www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/older-drivers.
- **NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION:** www.nhtsa.gov, 888-327-4236

**Always Wear Your Seat Belt.
Do Not Use Your Cell Phone While Driving.**