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# Macular degeneration

## An (almost) incurable disease

**Our eyes | Why is macular degeneration considered an (almost) incurable disease?**

**Michaela Noll**

**D** Macular degeneration is considered an (almost) incurable disease that is caused by complex and not yet fully understood biological processes. The macula, which is responsible for sharp vision, is damaged, resulting in progressive loss of vision. leads.

Genetic factors, environmental factors and the ageing process influence various forms of the disease. Researchers are working on therapies, but there is still no complete cure.

The limited regenerative capacity of the eye makes it difficult to reverse damage. However, advances in research and technology could make new approaches possible in the future. Until then, macular degeneration remains a medical challenge.

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**#macular degeneration #treatment  
#retinal degeneration #amd #diagnosis**



## What differential diagnoses need to be considered for macular degeneration?

Differential diagnosis is the process by which doctors consider and analyse various diseases or conditions to determine the most likely cause of a patient's symptoms. It is used to make an accurate diagnosis and provide the basis for appropriate treatment.

Various differential diagnoses can be considered in the diagnosis of macular degeneration, including diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, retinitis pigmentosa and other retinal diseases.

### Differential diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye disease caused by diabetes. It manifests itself in damage to the blood vessels of the retina, which can lead to haemorrhages, smouldering and ultimately to an impairment of the oxygen supply to the retina. These microvascular changes are a consequence of diabetes and can lead to visual impairment.

### Differential diagnosis of glaucoma

Glaucoma refers to a group of eye diseases in which the optic nerve is damaged by increased intraocular pressure. Typical symptoms are a gradual loss of the peripheral visual field and an increasing deterioration in vision.

### Differential diagnosis of retinitis pigmentosa

Retinitis pigmentosa is a hereditary eye disease in which the photoreceptors of the retina are progressively destroyed. Genetic tests and specific examinations of the peripheral visual field and night vision are carried out to differentiate it from other retinal diseases.

## What exactly is macular degeneration?

Macular degeneration is an eye disease in which the central area of the retina, the macula, is damaged. This leads to a gradual deterioration in vision, especially central vision. There are various forms of macular degeneration, some of which can be influenced by genetic and age-related factors.

Macular degeneration is also abbreviated as AMD, which stands for "age-related macular degeneration". The term "age-related" is used because this disease occurs more frequently in older people, especially after the age of 50.

There are two main forms of macular degeneration: the dry (atrophic) and the wet (exudative) form.

### Dry macular degeneration (atrophic AMD)

This form accounts for the majority of cases. The first signs are small, round, yellowish deposits on the underside of the retina. These deposits are called drusen.

### The drusen can lead to a degenerative process in the retina.

Drusen are accumulations of metabolic end products of the retina. This is a normal process when these accumulations are removed via the bloodstream. In the case of incipient macular degeneration, however, the drusen accumulate and pathological changes occur. One could also speak of arthrosis of the eye. This process usually progresses and leads to a gradual loss of vision.

### Wet macular degeneration (exudative AMD)

This form is rarer but generally more serious. Drusen can trigger the formation of new blood vessels in the underlying choroid. This process is an auxiliary mechanism of the body. It wants to help itself by improving the blood supply to the eye, but in this case it is very harmful to the eye. This is because the new blood vessels burst and haemorrhage into the vitreous body occurs. This can lead to sudden loss of vision or distorted vision.

Dry macular degeneration (atrophic AMD) accounts for the majority of cases at around 80-90% and is characterised by a gradual, progressive loss of vision. In comparison, wet macular degeneration (exudative AMD) accounts for around 10-20% of cases.

The type of macular degeneration influences the treatment options and the course of the disease.

## How common is macular degeneration in the German population?

Macular degeneration (AMD) affects around 6.7 million people in Europe, and this number is expected to increase by 15% by 2050 due to the ageing population.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers at the Paul Ehrlich Institute estimate that 7.4 million people in Germany are affected. That is around 9% of the German population in 2021 - almost one in ten citizens.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Source: British Journal of Ophthalmology, August 2020

2 Source: DNA of transposable elements identified as a cause of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), Paul-Ehrlich-Institut, January 2021

## → Michaela Noll

is a naturopath and founder of the [practice Augenakupunktur Noll in Bad Soden](#) am Taunus. The practice's expertise lies in the holistic treatment of chronic and degenerative eye diseases. Mrs Noll is certified in eye acupuncture according to Prof. Boel. The treatments she [The integrated eye therapy](#) developed by Noll combines the four elements of anamnesis, eye acupuncture according to Prof. Boel, individual infusions and special physiotherapy. In a [free information session](#), Mrs Noll answers all the patients' questions and explains the treatment scheme in detail.



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## Is there a connection between the diagnoses of glaucoma and macular degeneration?

Yes, there is a link between the diagnoses of macular degeneration and glaucoma. Common risk factors such as stress, family history, high blood pressure, smoking and ethnicity (e.g. African-Americans for glaucoma and Caucasians for macular degeneration) may be present despite different causes and areas of the eye being affected. People who already suffer from one of the two conditions may be at increased risk of developing the other, as the eye as a whole is more susceptible to age-related changes.

## What are the causes and risk factors for the development of macular degeneration?

The development of macular degeneration (AMD) is influenced by various causes and risk factors. The risk of developing AMD increases with age, especially from the age of 50. A genetic predisposition, familial clustering and certain gene variants can influence the risk of developing the disease. Lack of exercise, medication, illnesses and smoking are considered important risk factors and can worsen the progression of AMD.

Diet also plays a role, particularly a lack of vitamins and antioxidants. Women may have a higher risk of AMD than men. High blood pressure, prolonged unprotected exposure to the sun and the presence of cardiovascular disease are further influencing factors.

Preventive measures and early detection can help to take the individual risk profile into account and minimise the risk of the development or progression of AMD.

## What is the course of a typical macular degeneration?

The course of macular degeneration (AMD) varies depending on the type of AMD, the individual factors and the effectiveness of the treatment. A general representation of the typical progression could be as follows:

### 1. Early stage

- ▶ In the early stages, AMD is usually asymptomatic.
- ▶ The first signs may be a slight deterioration in vision or distortion of central vision.
- ▶ The diagnosis is usually made by an ophthalmological examination, during which drusen (deposits) and other changes in the macula are assessed.

### 2. Advanced stage - dry AMD

- ▶ As dry AMD progresses, it can lead to progressive vision loss as more and more photoreceptors in the macula are destroyed.
- ▶ This leads to an increasing loss of central vision and thus to difficulties in reading and recognising fine details.
- ▶ In some cases, dry AMD can develop into the wet form.

### 3. Advanced stage - wet AMD

- ▶ Wet AMD is often characterised by a faster and more severe loss of vision.
- ▶ Abnormal growth of the blood vessels leads to haemorrhages, fluid accumulation and damage to the macula.
- ▶ Sudden and severe loss of central vision.

It is important to realise that AMD can remain stable in some people while progressing in others.

## What needs to be considered in the diagnosis and early detection of macular degeneration?

A comprehensive diagnosis and early detection of macular degeneration (AMD) requires regular ophthalmological examinations with an Amsler grid test, optical coherence tomography (OCT) and, if necessary, fluorescein angiography.

Risk factors such as age, family history, smoking and high blood pressure must be considered on an individual basis. Early intervention when there are signs of AMD, especially in the wet form, is crucial to slowing down the progression of the disease and preserving vision.

In addition, lifestyle changes, quitting smoking and a healthy diet can help to influence the risk of AMD. A holistic approach makes it possible to take appropriate measures at an early stage and monitor the progression of the disease.

## Early detection for the treatment strategy

The early detection of macular degeneration plays a decisive role in the development of effective treatment strategies. Timely diagnosis enables interventional measures to be taken to slow down the progression of the disease and preserve vision, particularly in the case of wet AMD. Early diagnosis also enables targeted adaptation of the treatment plan and comprehensive care in order to achieve the best possible benefit for patients.

## How does a diagnosis of macular degeneration affect quality of life and the organisation of everyday life?

A diagnosis of macular degeneration has a significant impact on quality of life and the organisation of everyday life. The loss of vision in the central visual field leads to difficulties in reading, recognising details and central vision. Mobility and orientation problems increase the risk of falling, impair independence and can lead to emotional stress.

The social impact manifests itself in difficulties with activities that require sharp vision, which can lead to possible isolation. The emotional burden of the diagnosis requires extensive support.

## What treatment options are there for macular degeneration?

The treatment of macular degeneration depends on the type of disease. Anti-VEGF injections are used for wet macular degeneration. The so-called VEGF inhibitors (vascular endothelial growth factor) are preparations that are injected into the eye to block the VEGF enzyme, i.e. it is intended to suppress the formation of new blood vessels.

There is no specific drug therapy for dry macular degeneration. However, taking dietary supplements containing antioxidant vitamins and minerals can help to slow down the progression of the disease. In addition, lifestyle factors such as a balanced diet, exercise, smoking cessation and the control of concomitant diseases play a decisive role.

## Naturopathic treatment options

Naturopathic approaches to the treatment of macular degeneration emphasise a holistic approach that includes nutrition,

lifestyle and dietary supplements. A diet rich in antioxidants and vitamins such as A, C and E as well as minerals such as zinc and selenium is often recommended to promote eye health. In addition, omega-3 fatty acids from fish oil play a role as they have anti-inflammatory properties.

Other measures include controlling blood sugar and blood pressure, as diabetes and high blood pressure can increase the risk of macular degeneration. Naturopathic therapists also recommend special dietary supplements with lutein and zeaxanthin, as these carotenoids are said to have a protective effect on the retina.

Another focus is the regulation of inflammatory processes in the body through the use of natural remedies. This includes turmeric, for example, with its active ingredient curcumin, which has anti-inflammatory properties. Promoting general health and protecting against oxidative stress are key aspects of naturopathic approaches to support people with macular degeneration.

**However, it is important to emphasise that naturopathic methods should not be seen as a substitute but as a supplement to conventional medical therapies and that consultation with the attending physician is advisable.**

## Integrated eye therapy according to Noll

Naturopathic treatment options for macular degeneration also include specialised approaches such as eye acupuncture. Integrated eye therapy according to Noll consists of a comprehensive (1.) medical history, (2.) eye acupuncture according to Prof. Boel, (3.) individual infusions and (4.) special physiotherapy.

The central role of eye acupuncture according to Prof. John Boel is emphasised by treatment planning tailored to the individual clinical picture.

It is important to note that these approaches should be seen as complementary measures and consultation with the attending physician is recommended.

## What role does personalised visual training play in the treatment of macular degeneration?

Customised vision training plays a crucial role in the treatment of macular degeneration by being tailored to the patient's individual needs and limitations. This vision training focuses on maximising remaining vision and improving functionality in everyday life.

Targeted exercises are used to strengthen other senses and abilities in order to compensate for the challenges of vision loss. Vision training tailored to the patient therefore not only helps to optimise visual performance, but also promotes the individual's adaptability and quality of life in dealing with macular degeneration.

## Why is a combination of conventional medical and naturopathic treatment useful?

The combination of conventional medical and naturopathic treatment can be useful in the treatment of macular degeneration. Conventional medicine offers proven and evidence-based approaches such as anti-VEGF injections, which inhibit the abnormal growth of blood vessels. At the same time, naturopathy emphasises a holistic approach that integrates diet, lifestyle and specific therapies such as acupuncture.


The combination of these two approaches can lead to a comprehensive treatment that not only treats the symptoms directly, but also takes into account the underlying causes and factors that favour them.

## Conclusion

Macular degeneration is a complex age-related eye disease with a significant impact on the quality of life of those affected. While conventional medical treatment, particularly of the wet form, is based on established therapeutic approaches such as anti-VEGF injections, naturopathy focuses on a holistic approach. This includes diet, lifestyle and specific therapies such as eye acupuncture.

Individualised diagnostics and early detection play a key role in being able to take appropriate measures in good time. Research is working on advanced approaches, while the increasing prevalence of macular degeneration in the ageing population emphasises the importance of effective treatment options.

The challenges of treatment emphasise the need for a flexible approach that combines conventional and naturopathic methods to achieve the best outcome for the patient. A holistic view of macular degeneration, taking into account advances in conventional medicine, naturopathic approaches and individualised vision training, enables optimised care that creates hope and prospects for those affected.

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