



Supported by the AMD Alliance and the Irish Ophthalmic Health Advisory Board



AMD is the biggest cause of blindness in the over 50s



A simple test (enclosed), the Amsler Grid can help you spot the early symptoms of AMD - but for a thorough eye check go to your optician



If you think you could be experiencing the early symptoms of AMD, go to your optician within the next week



Acting early could reduce further damage to your eyesight



AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION



Provided as a service to medicine by Novartis



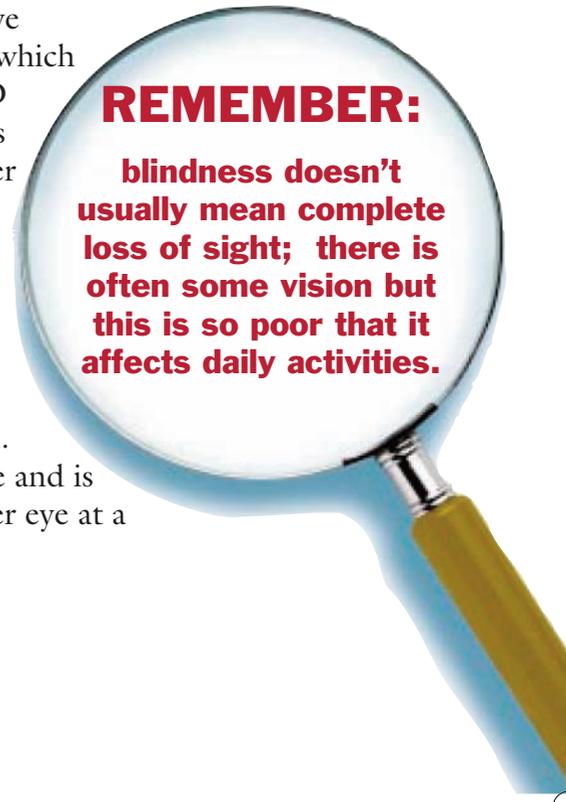
About this booklet

This booklet is designed to provide you with information about Age-related Macular Degeneration (or AMD forshort). It describes what AMD is, as well as how it affectsyour vision and how to identify the signs and symptoms of the condition. It will also tell you what you should do if youhave any concerns, or if you want more detailed information about AMD.

What about AMD?

AMD (Age-related Macular Degeneration) is a conditionthat can affect your eyes as you get older. In fact, in the over50s, AMD is the leading cause of sightloss in Ireland, with over 60,000Irish people suffering from thecondition (Source: FightingBlindness).AMD affects the macula - a small part of the eye responsible for central vision which allows you to see detail. AMD usually starts in one eye and is highly likely to affect the other eye at a later stage. (See diagram opposite)

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REMEMBER:

blindness doesn't usually mean complete loss of sight; there is often some vision but this is so poor that it affects daily activities.

FORESIGHT

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Looking for further help and advice?

The following addresses are for organisations that can offer you advice and support about AMD, other eye conditions, low vision support and other age-related matters.

FIGHTING BLINDNESS (IRELAND)
1 Christchurch Hall, High Street,
Dublin 8
Tel: (01) 873 1004
Web: www.fightingblindness.ie



NCBI
Whitworth Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9
Tel: 1850 33 43 53
Fax: (01) 8307787
Web: www.ncbi.ie



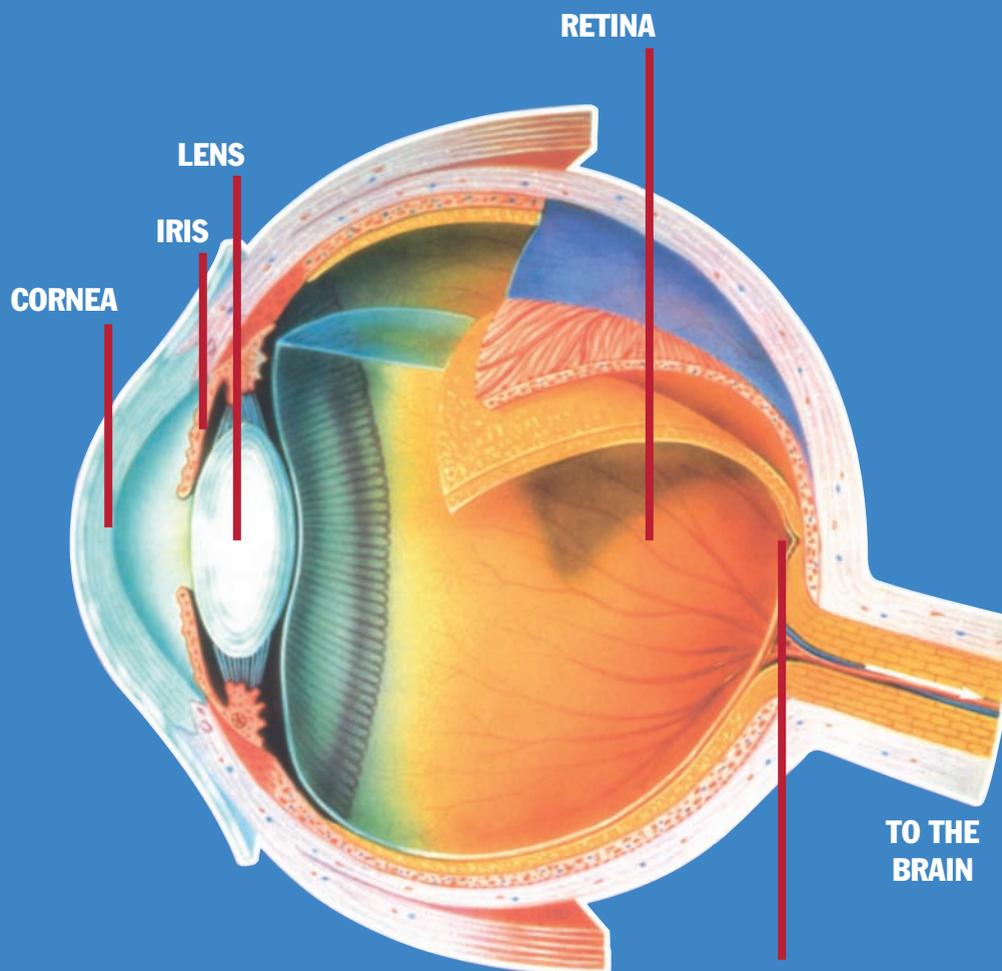
M.I.S.T
Macular Impairment Support & Togetherness
Croswaithe Park West, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Tel: (01) 2809895/4947396
Email: beazel@indigo.ie



AGE ACTION IRELAND
30/31 Lower Camden Street, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 475 6989/478 5060
Fax: (01) 475 6011
Email: info@ageaction.ie



IRISH OPHTHALMIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD
5th Floor, Huguenot House,
35-38 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 678 9333
Fax: (01) 661 4408



MACULA

The macula is located in the centre of the retina at the back of the eye.

As you read, images are focused onto the cells of the macula.

From here, this information is passed to the brain where it is converted into a picture of what you are seeing.

This central vision allows you to read, drive and perform other activities where recognising detail is important.

“Wet” and “Dry” AMD

Dry AMD is the most common form of the condition and develops slowly, eventually leading to loss of central vision. Wet AMD is caused by leaky blood vessels inside the eye. It is less common than dry AMD but it can cause more rapid loss of vision.

What causes AMD?

The exact causes of AMD are still unknown. Although there can be a history of the condition in certain families, AMD is still not believed to be genetic, however, if close relatives have suffered with sight loss in the past, then it may be worth getting your eyes checked more regularly.

Studies have shown a definite link between smoking and AMD. Other factors such as high blood pressure and poor diet can also lead to a greater risk of getting AMD. Indeed, recent research (AREDS study) has shown that vitamins (C & E), beta-carotene, copper and zinc supplements in your diet, can help reduce the risk of developing AMD.

Diabetic Retinopathy (DR)

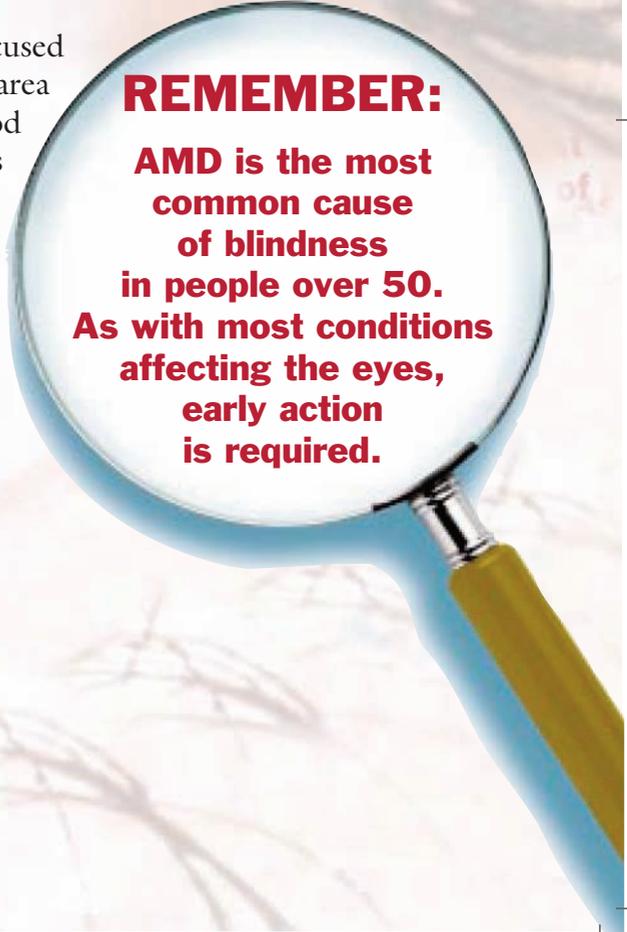
This is the most serious eye condition in people with diabetes, and affects the retina.

People who have had diabetes for a long time may have developed ‘Background Retinopathy’ which does not pose an immediate threat.

Two other forms of DR can however damage eyesight, by causing leakages in the fine blood vessels of the retina.

If treated in time, the damage caused by DR can be limited using laser treatment.

A laser beam is carefully focused exactly on to the damaged area and it seals the leaking blood vessels - remember that this will only save any remaining sight and won’t reverse any previous sight loss.



REMEMBER:
AMD is the most common cause of blindness in people over 50. As with most conditions affecting the eyes, early action is required.

Glaucoma

This is a disease characterised by an increase in pressure within the eyeball. This causes damage to the delicate nerve cells and loss of visual fields - the 'all-round' sight outside of the central vision.

If left untreated, vision gets worse and sufferers often say that their vision is like looking through a tube.

Some people may see haloes around lights, especially at night.

The commonest form of glaucoma is usually symptom free until there has been a permanent loss of vision.

SO EARLY DETECTION BY SCREENING IS VITAL

The risk of developing glaucoma increases with age, but may occur earlier if there is a family history of the disease. It is also usually more common in people of African or African-Caribbean origin.

How common is AMD?

Today in Ireland, there are thousands of people with AMD. However, less than 1 in 7 of these will have wet AMD, the type of AMD that will cause rapid sight loss. The chances of getting AMD increase as you get older. However, most people develop the dry form, which is currently untreatable. Wet AMD - the type that causes rapid vision loss - can in many cases be treated and sight loss reduced, but early diagnosis is vital. In both cases, help and support is available from low vision services.

There is a simple test for the early symptoms of AMD and this will be explained in the following sections.

REMEMBER:

**AMD will not cause a total loss of vision.
If you have AMD help and support is available to maximise your remaining vision and to help you maintain an active and independent life.
Early detection is important and your optician is the best person to check your eyes.**

How does AMD affect vision?

The most obvious symptoms of AMD are distortion and blurring in the centre of vision.

The photograph opposite shows how some people with AMD see the world - although the outer part of vision is unaffected the central part becomes obstructed.

Consequently, people with AMD have difficulty in recognising detail and this can show itself when reading, driving and even when trying to identify a familiar face.

REMEMBER:

AMD usually starts in one eye and then may affect the other eye at a later date. Significant loss of vision can occur within 3-6 months. Early action is necessary to minimise the damage to your eyesight and to help you adjust to sight loss.

Other conditions that affect the eye

There are other conditions that affect your eyesight, particularly as you get older. Your optician will look out for any signs of these during your routine eye test, which is why it is important to get your eyes tested regularly - particularly as some of these conditions do not have any symptoms until after the eye is damaged.

Cataracts

A cataract is where the eye's lens becomes cloudy, causing impaired vision.

Both eyes can be affected and vision is often worst affected in bright sunlight.

Cataracts are usually due to the aging process, but they can occur as the result of injury, inflammation or certain drug therapies.

When a cataract causes significant symptoms it can be surgically removed and replaced with an artificial lens.

Treatment Options

There are a number of proven treatments for people who have the most severe type of AMD (wet AMD).

They are:

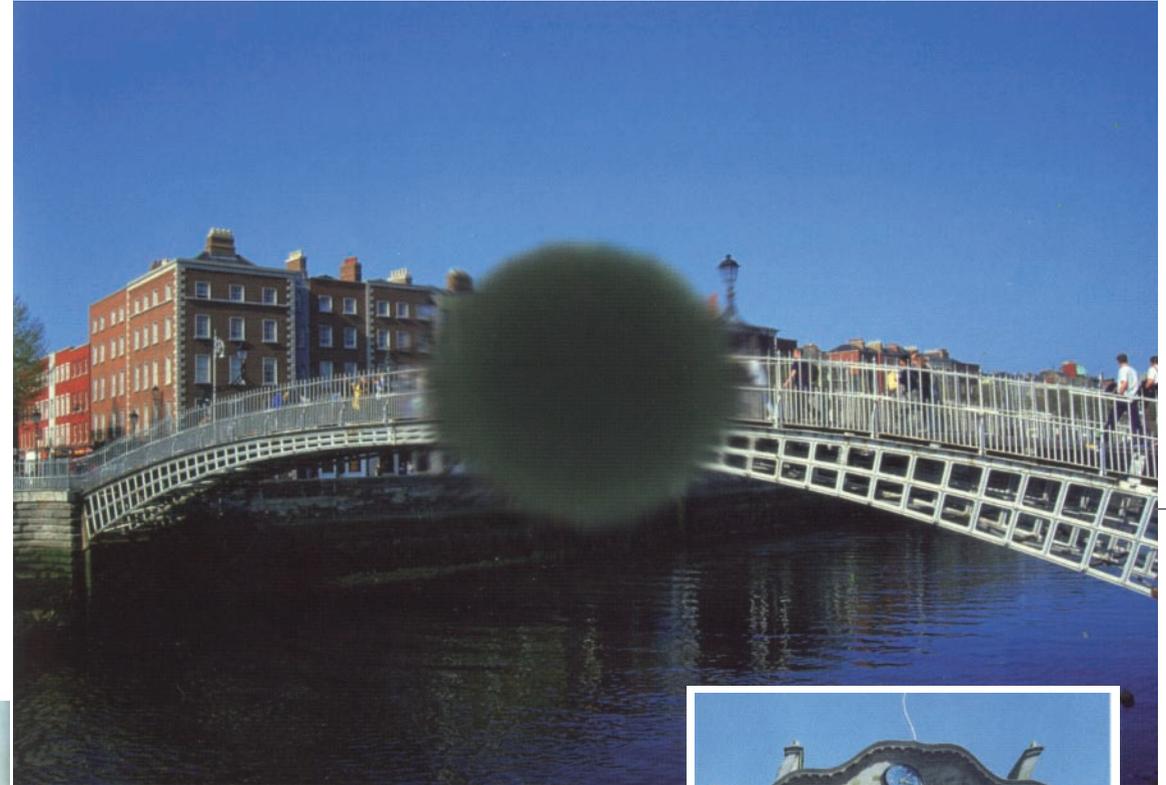
1. Photodynamic Therapy (PDT)

2. Laser Photocoagulation (LPC)

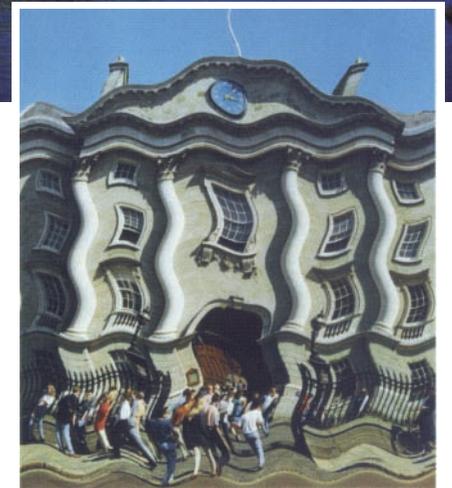
If you are interested in these, ask your doctor, optician or ophthalmologist; they should be able to give you more information and advice. Unfortunately, there are no proven treatments for dry AMD but ongoing research is seeking to provide suitable new therapies. Help and support are available from low vision services and the patient support groups listed in this booklet. If you have experienced recent changes to your vision, you should seek professional advice even if you have visited your optician in the last two years.



How you might see the world if you had AMD



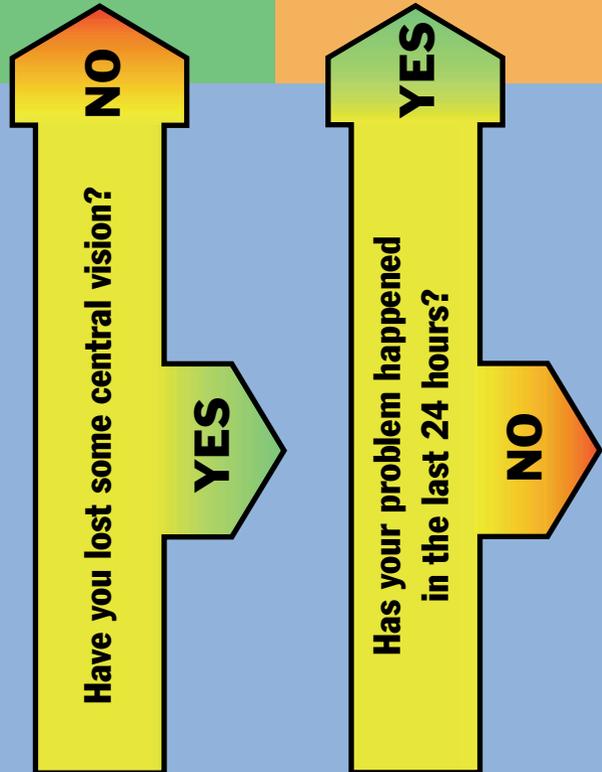
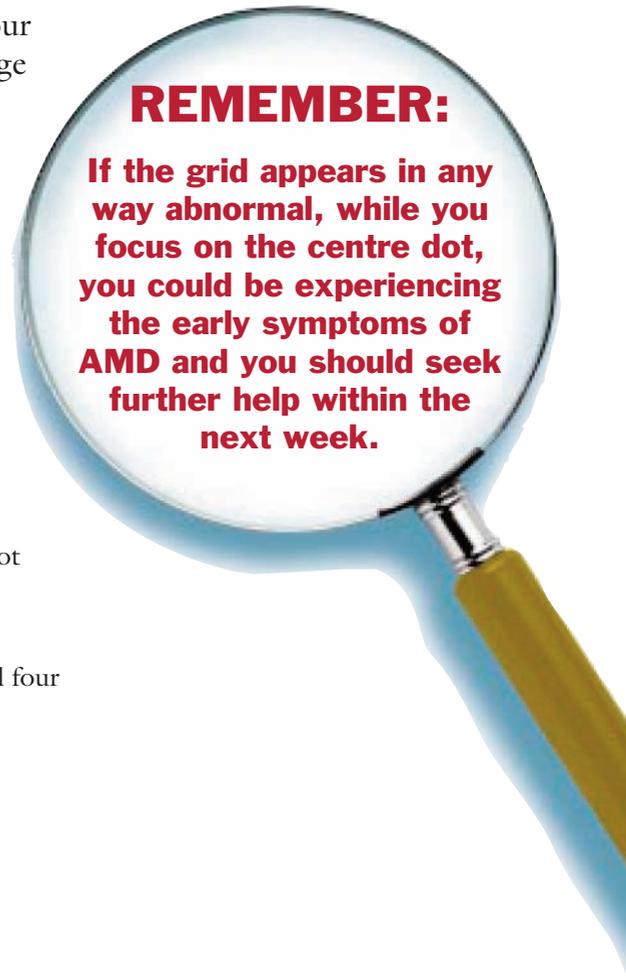
The early symptoms of distortion



Testing for the early symptoms of AMD

The grid on the opposite page is a quick and simple test, known as The Amsler Grid. It can help to determine whether you are experiencing the early symptoms of AMD, but remember it is not a substitute for an eye test. Please follow these simple instructions now:

- Hold the grid around 12 inches (30cm) in front of your eyes (this is the average reading distance)
- If you wear reading glasses leave them on but do not wear varifocals or distance glasses
- Cover one eye with your hand and focus with your other eye on the centre dot
- Check that you can see all four corners of the grid



AMD IS UNLIKELY

However you should seek professional advice as a matter of urgency

If the above symptoms apply to you, you should seek professional advice as a matter of urgency

AMD COULD BE THE CAUSE OF YOUR SYMPTOMS

PLEASE MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR OPTICIAN DURING THE NEXT WEEK

In the meantime if you need any advice contact Fighting Blindness, 1 Christchurch Hall, High Street, Dublin 8; Tel: (01) 873 1004; info@fightingblindness.ie ; or see www.fightingblindness.ie

FLOW DIAGRAM

If you are experiencing **NEW** problems with your eyesight, that your optician, doctor or ophthalmologist are not aware of, then ask yourself the following questions...

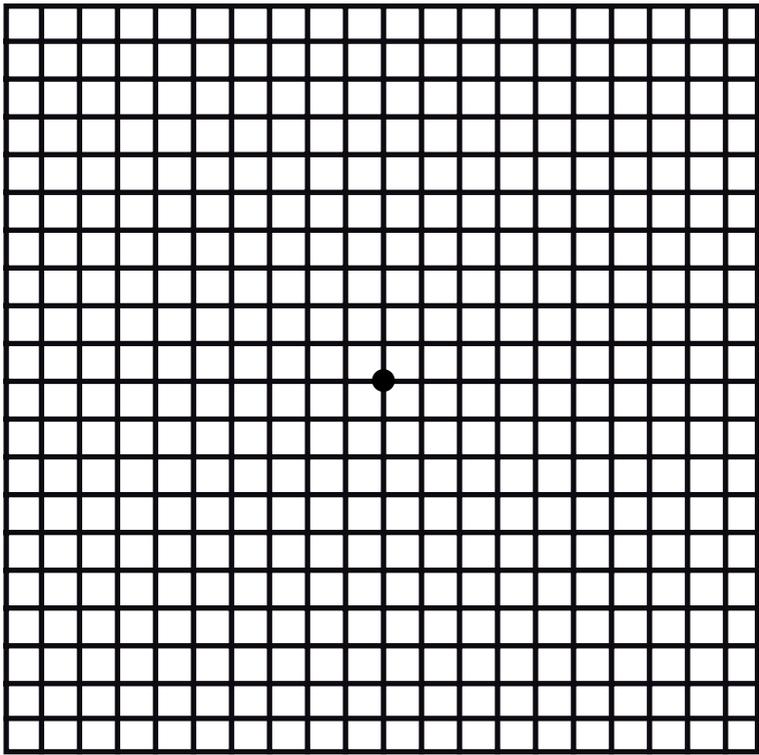
NO
Are you experiencing **NEW** problems in just one of your eyes?
YES

NO
Has your vision become distorted and/or blurred?
YES

AMD IS UNLIKELY

However you should still make arrangements to see your doctor or optician

Check for the early symptoms of AMD - The Amsler Grid

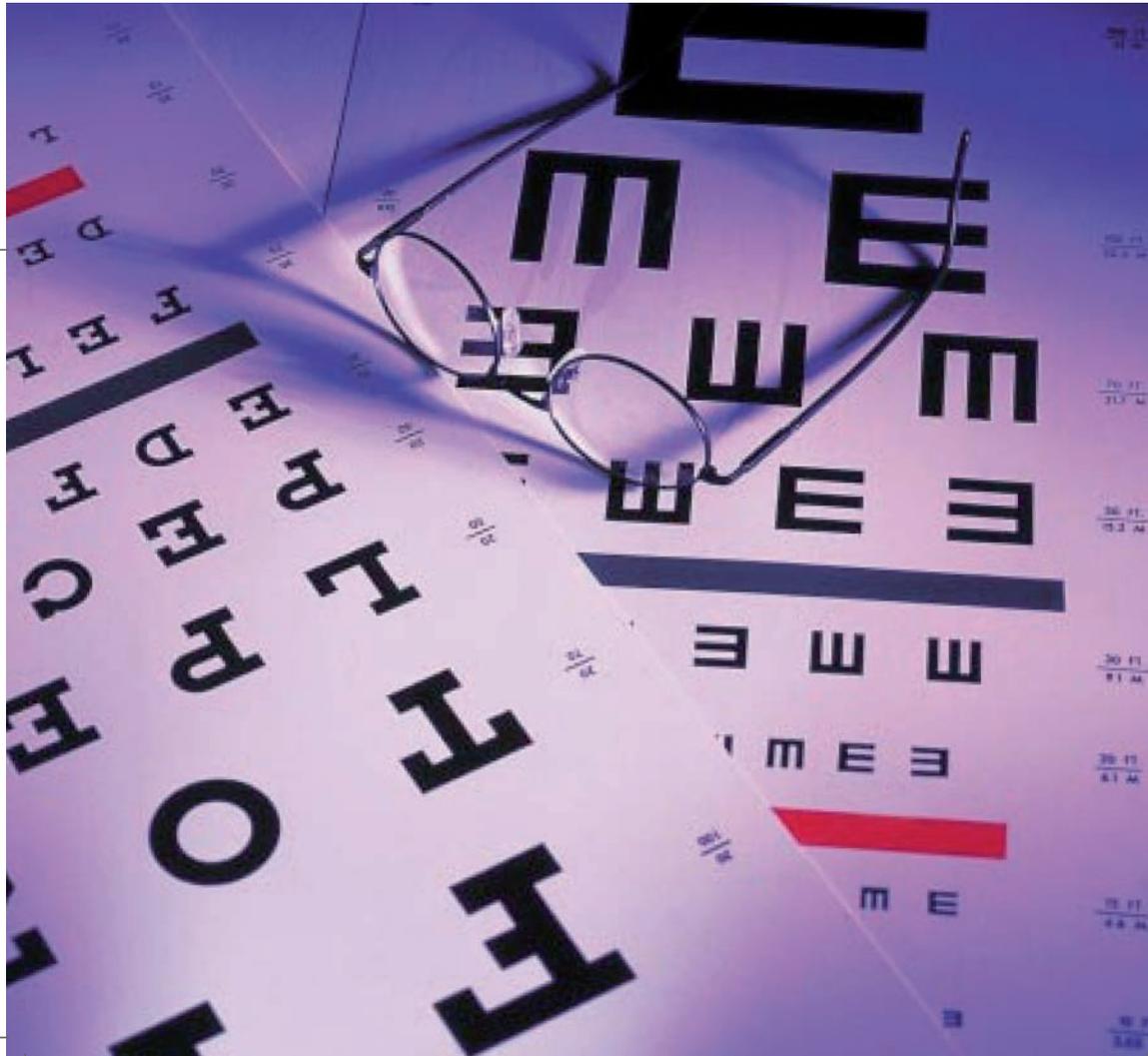


If areas of the grid appear blurred, distorted, or in any way abnormal then you could be displaying the early signs of AMD

The next section will go into more detail about what to do next

What to do next if the grid looked perfectly normal

If the Amsler Grid appeared perfectly normal to you then you probably don't have AMD. However, if you are over 50 and have not been to the optician in the last two years, you should seriously consider making an appointment now. It is also important to keep testing your eyes at home every 2 months using the Amsler Grid.



What to do next if the grid didn't look normal

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of AMD after you have used the Amsler Grid on the previous page, then you should visit your doctor or optician within the next week.

As well as the Amsler test you performed earlier, your optician, GP or ophthalmologist (eye doctor) will perform other tests, and if necessary, discuss treatment options with you. Advice and support is also available from the organisations listed at the end of this booklet.

The diagram on the following page will help you to assess further whether you are likely to be displaying the early symptoms of AMD, and what to do next.

REMEMBER:

If you think that you could be experiencing symptoms of AMD visit your optician within the next week - acting early could prevent further damage to your eyesight.