

# Living with geographic atrophy

**What to expect and how  
to navigate your condition**

Apellis

Developed and funded by Apellis



This booklet is designed to provide you with an overview of geographic atrophy (GA), answer some of the questions you may have, and provide useful strategies to help you navigate your condition.

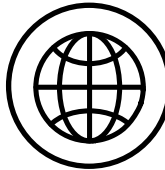
**Each person's experience with GA is unique. This brochure is intended to be informational only and should not replace medical advice. Always talk to your doctor about any medical decisions.**

Any unfamiliar words used in this booklet are defined in the glossary on page 15.

# What is geographic atrophy (GA)?



GA is an advanced form of age-related macular degeneration, or AMD.<sup>1</sup>



Over 5 million people worldwide are affected by GA.<sup>1</sup>



It is a progressive disease that can lead to permanent and irreversible vision loss.<sup>1</sup>



There are various strategies to help people adjust to living with GA.

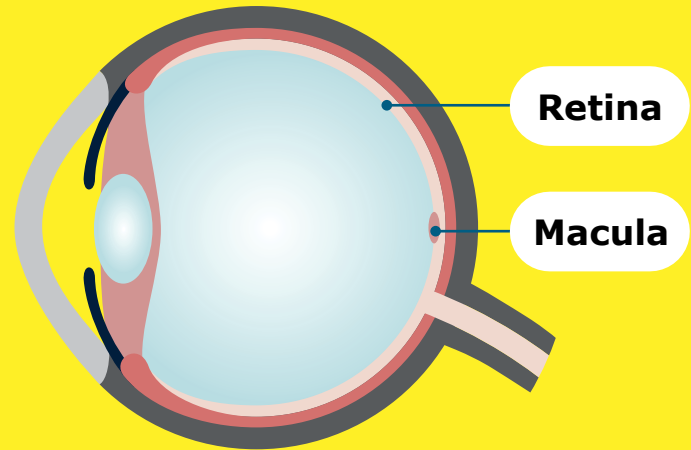
# Understanding AMD

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) affects part of the retina called the **macula**, which is important for vision. This disease mainly affects those over the age of 60.<sup>2</sup>

**There are two main types:**<sup>2,3</sup>

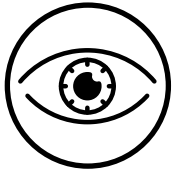
**Wet:** An advanced form of AMD where abnormal blood vessels form and leak fluid into the retina.

**Dry:** Here, a build-up of waste products causes damage to the macula. This type of AMD has early, intermediate and late stages.



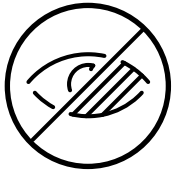
Cross-section of the eye.

# Stages of AMD



## Early/intermediate AMD

There may be no or mild symptoms, e.g. some blurriness and difficulty seeing in low light.<sup>3</sup>



## Late, or advanced AMD

Geographic atrophy and wet AMD are both forms of advanced AMD.<sup>3</sup>

As GA progresses, blurry spots develop near the centre of vision, eventually leading to loss of central vision.<sup>2</sup>

**Early/intermediate  
AMD can develop  
into GA, wet AMD,  
or both GA and  
wet AMD<sup>2</sup>**

Visit  
[dryamd.uk/about-amd](http://dryamd.uk/about-amd)  
to learn more about  
AMD and GA.

# Causes of GA

There are a number of risk factors that can lead to AMD, which may then progress to GA.

## Risk factors include:<sup>4</sup>



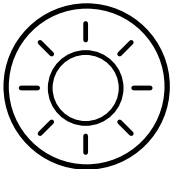
Ageing



History of smoking



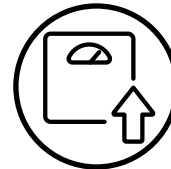
Family history



Sunlight exposure



High blood pressure and cholesterol



Obesity and low physical activity

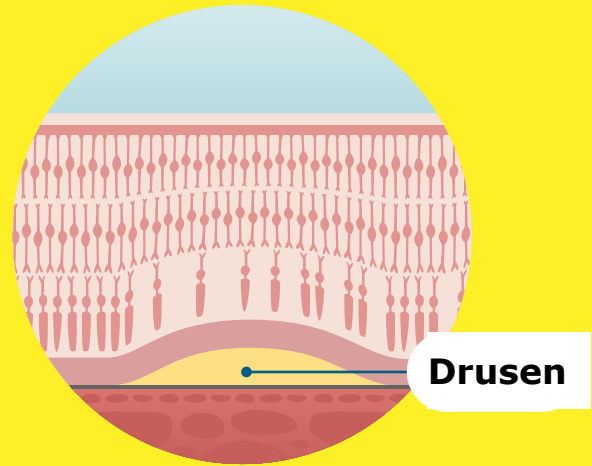


How GA may affect vision.

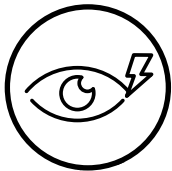
## How GA develops

GA risk factors can lead to a build-up of waste products, called **drusen**, in the macula.

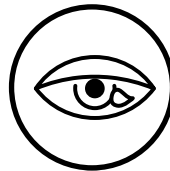
These are made up of proteins and fats that the body no longer needs.<sup>1,2</sup>



Cross-section of the macula.



Drusen may play a role in **overactivation** of parts of the immune system in the eye, causing inflammation.<sup>1</sup>



This inflammation can damage cells in the macula, forming **GA lesions**.<sup>1</sup>

# How GA can impact vision

With GA, common activities like reading and driving at night may become harder as GA lesions grow larger.

## Common signs and symptoms of GA include:<sup>2-4</sup>



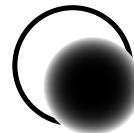
Blurry spots in or around  
centre of vision



Trouble reading and  
recognising faces



Difficulty seeing  
in the dark



Hazy or  
blurred vision



# Monitoring vision changes

It is important to **keep track** of any changes to your vision.

You can use the Amsler grid to help you easily monitor your vision at home.



**If you notice any changes in your vision, it is important to tell your ophthalmologist or optometrist as soon as possible**

Visit  
*[dryamd.uk/support-tools](https://dryamd.uk/support-tools)*  
to access an Amsler grid you can print out and use to test your eyes regularly.

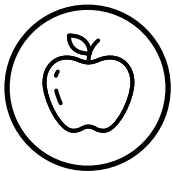
# Living well with GA

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help you manage your condition and adjust to living with GA.



## Regular monitoring<sup>5</sup>

- Attending recommended eye exams
- Self-monitoring using the Amsler grid



## Lifestyle changes<sup>5</sup>

- Quitting smoking
- Eating a healthy diet
- Exercising regularly



# Talking about GA

Don't be afraid to ask for help – telling people about your GA is often the first step to making sure you get the support you need.



## **Talk to your doctor**

- Monitor your vision
- Communicate openly and honestly



## **Talking to your loved ones**

- Be open and honest
- Involve them in your journey

Visit  
*[dryamd.uk/support-tools](https://dryamd.uk/support-tools)*  
to access an infographic  
about GA causes,  
signs and symptoms.

# Navigating vision loss

There are tools that may help you keep doing the things you enjoy and live as independently as possible.



## Life at home

- Have even and bright lighting
- Use technology with accessibility features



## Outside the house

- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes
- Try shopping at quiet times of the day

Visit  
*[macularsociety.org/support](https://macularsociety.org/support)*  
for more advice on  
how to cope with GA  
and vision loss.

# Taking care of mental well-being

If you experience feelings of depression, anxiety or loss of independence, try the following advice.



**Stay connected** with friends and family



**Lead an active lifestyle,** e.g. try tai chi or yoga, or exercise with a friend



**Try relaxation methods** like meditation and therapy to help manage stress



**Seek support,** e.g. through patient groups, to connect with others who have vision loss

## Further resources and support

Remember that you don't have to manage GA on your own. You can access support from your doctor, but also friends, family and patient groups.

This booklet has been developed in collaboration with the following patient organisations to ensure that it truly meets the needs of people with GA and those who care for them.

**Macular Society (UK)**  
Visit: *macularsociety.org*

# Glossary of terms

**Age-related macular degeneration (AMD):** An eye condition that affects the macula in the eye. It is common in those aged 60 and over.

**Amsler grid:** A self-monitoring tool to detect early changes in vision.

**Drusen:** Waste products that build up in the retina.

**Geographic atrophy (GA):** An advanced form of AMD that leads to progressive and irreversible vision loss.

**GA lesion:** An area of damage in the retina that occurs in GA.

**Macula:** The centre of the retina, responsible for central vision.

**Retina:** Lines the back wall of the eye and turns light into signals that help the brain recognise what the eye is seeing.

# Do you have any more questions?

## References

1. Boyer DS, *et al.* *Retina*. 2017;37(5):819–835.
2. WebMD. What is geographic atrophy? 2022. Available at: <https://www.webmd.com/eye-health/what-is-geographic-atrophy> (Accessed November 2023).
3. National Eye Institute. Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD). Available at: <https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/eye-conditions-and-diseases/age-related-macular-degeneration> (Accessed November 2023).
4. BrightFocus Foundation. Geographic atrophy. Available at: <https://www.brightfocus.org/macular/geographic-atrophy> (Accessed November 2023).
5. BrightFocus Foundation. Geographic atrophy (GA) fact sheet. 2023. Available at: <https://www.brightfocus.org/macular/article/geographic-atrophy-ga-fact-sheet> (Accessed November 2023).