

Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) Referral Guidance

Key messages

- Urgently refer all cases of suspected acute-onset neovascular age-related macular degeneration (AMD) to an ophthalmologist [1].
- Refer any uncertain diagnosis of AMD, or uncertainty about the disease stage, to an ophthalmologist [1].

Presentation

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a common eye condition in which age-related changes that have no obvious cause occur in the central area of the retina (macula) [1]. AMD occurs in people of age 50 years and older and is the most common cause of blindness in the UK [2].

Clinical presentation [1,3,4]:

- difficulty with reading, watching television, or face recognition
- blurred or distorted vision (dysmorphopsia), often with patients complaining that straight lines appear crooked or wavy
- loss or reduction in central vision (scotoma)
- problems adjusting to changes in lighting
- gradual or rapid visual loss

Neovascular AMD:

- In neovascular AMD, new blood vessels are formed from the inner choroid and allow blood constituents to leak out [1,2]
- consider if fundal examination shows some or all of the following [1]:
 - hard exudates
 - areas of haemorrhage
 - subretinal fluid exudate
 - retinal pigment abnormalities
- symptoms are consistent with sudden or rapidly progressive visual loss, such as [1]:
 - dysmorphopsia
 - scotoma
 - dark patches in central vision

Non-neovascular AMD [1]:

- drusen formation and pigment changes – early AMD
- gradual thinning and development of multiple patches throughout the macula (geographic atrophy)
- no vision loss in early stages
- gradual vision loss and blurring as geographical atrophy develops

Pre-referral

Management

Give patients advice and written information on acute macular degeneration (AMD) and [1]:

- rehabilitation services
- useful contact numbers, e.g. RNIB, Macular Society, local blind society

Advise patients:

- about disease prognosis and how to monitor for symptoms of disease progression, most commonly [1]:
 - blurred vision
 - dysmorphopsia
 - scotoma
- advise to quit smoking [1]
- about the risk of hallucinations [2]
- visual handicap registration [1]
- about the use of AMSLER GRID chart to monitor vision at home by the patient

Evaluate whether visual aids are needed [1]:

- patients with early AMD generally have normal vision and visual aids are not needed
- discuss visual aids in patients with later stages of disease who have a degree of vision loss
- visual aids may enhance ability to see fine detail and contrast, but the patient will not have the same level of vision as before the onset of AMD

Regularly monitor patients with AMD, either in general practice or local optometrist [1]:

- to detect progressive visual loss or the development of neovascularisation
- to provide support for any problems related to vision loss

Referral

Referral criteria

Urgently refer to an ophthalmologist:

- all cases of suspected acute-onset neovascular age-related macular degeneration (AMD) for assessment and treatment [1]

Refer to an ophthalmologist [1]:

- any uncertain diagnosis of AMD or uncertainty about the disease stage
- consider non-urgent referral for patients with evidence of geographic atrophy

Refer to an optometrist:

- patients with non-neovascular AMD for monitoring in the community [1]

For patients being monitored in the community, referral to an ophthalmologist is indicated when [1]:

- there is rapidly developing visual failure but still reasonable vision
- there is significant visual loss needing accurate diagnosis
- there is significant visual loss needing partially sighted or blind registration

Resources

References

- [1] Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth). Age-related macular degeneration guidelines for management. London: RCOphth; 2013. Available from: http://www.rcophth.ac.uk/core/core_picker/download.asp?id=1851&filetitle=Age%2DRelated+Macular+Degeneration%3A+Guidelines+for+Management+2013
- [2] Clinical Knowledge Summaries (CKS). Macular degeneration (patient information). Newcastle upon Tyne: CKS; 2010. Available from: <http://cks.nice.org.uk/macular-degeneration-age-related#azTab>
- [3] American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Retina/Vitreous Panel. Age-related macular degeneration. San Francisco, CA: AAO; 2008. Available from: http://www.guideline.gov/summary/summary.aspx?doc_id=14275&nbr=7151&ss=6&xl=999
- [4] Contributors representing the Royal College of Ophthalmology (RCOphth); 2010

This piece of referral guidance has been developed according to the Map of Medicine editorial methodology. It is based on high quality guidelines, critically appraised meta-analyses and systematic reviews, and practice-based recommendations. Local editorial changes relevant to Mid Nottinghamshire may have been made.