

# YOUR HEALTH

with Jill Robinson



## Harry's tale of hope for sufferers of AMD

■ **CLEAR BENEFITS** – former optician Harry Marsland says taking a supplement which contains anti-oxidants has improved his eyesight, which had been damaged by AMD

ET picture by Alan Castle: 110208-11-03



It's a disease that currently affects 30 million people and is the leading cause of blindness in the world today. But research is still being conducted into age-related macular degeneration, or AMD as it is commonly known.

There has been a lot of debate recently about how people receive treatment for AMD, as well as what treatments actually work.

The Evening Telegraph met Harry Marsland, 73, to find out what treatment he thinks has worked best for him and which has actually helped him regain his sight. Mr Marsland, from Oundle, is a retired optician and discovered he had AMD seven years ago.

He said: "I was on holiday with my wife, Nina, in 2001 and I noticed a change in my vision. Straight lines had become wavy, such as rooftops or lamp-posts.

"Within 10 days of coming home, I had visited two ophthalmologists and discovered that I had AMD."

AMD is most common in people over 60 and there are two types, referred to as 'wet' and 'dry'.

The names have nothing to do with how the eye feels, but rather what an ophthalmologist will see when looking at the macula, which is a very small area in the centre of the retina.

'Dry' AMD is the most common and develops slowly, causing gradual loss of central vision.

'Wet' AMD develops much more quickly and is usually manifested by lines of vision appearing to be distorted, as it was for Mr Marsland.

The condition causes new blood vessels to grow behind the retina, causing bleeding and scarring which eventually leads to sight loss.

Mr Marsland's tests revealed he had a double misfortune, having developed 'wet' AMD in his right eye and in his left eye the potential to develop either 'wet' or 'dry' AMD.

Mr Marsland said: "The statistical odds for retaining my eyesight were not good, it was thought that my left eye would become severely affected within five years."

Unlike 'dry' AMD, 'wet' AMD causes the body to respond by constructing extra blood vessels to supply the retina with extra nutrients. But it is actually these extra blood vessels that can cause severe damage.

Mr Marsland underwent laser treatment to destroy the vessels, but the operation failed to work and left his eye centrally blind with scar tissue.

He said: "It was a risk I'd been aware of before the operation but even though it was only seven years ago, at the time it was my only option."

Mr Marsland was an optometrist for 25 years but during his years of practice, very little research had been conducted into AMD.

Mr Marsland explained: "I had a text book from 1979 and while other eye diseases like cataracts had full chapters, AMD only had 17 lines of information.

"Obviously opticians know a lot more

about it now but I still don't think enough is being done to make people aware of it." Within 12 months, Mr Marsland experienced further deterioration in his left eye and by 2006, he was no longer able to see outdoors at night and the central vision in his left eye was only good in extremely good daylight.

He said: "People have to understand it's not complete blindness, it's the central vision that is blind, so if you looked at a person's face it would be blurry, but around it would be much clearer.

"I had to buy a high intensity reading light to help me read as well as a magnifying glass. I couldn't drive at night and at one point I thought I might have to learn Braille but thankfully in the end I didn't have to."

This was because Mr Marsland found a unique supplement called macushield with MZ, which contains all three anti-oxidants found in the macula, meso-zeaxanthin, lutein and zeaxanthin, which are necessary to combat AMD.

Mr Marsland said: "It is the only supplement that will help protect tissues against potentially damaging effects and designed specially to support macular health.

"All the supplements I had taken previously hadn't improved my sight – they had just stopped it from getting worse – but after starting this one in April last year, I soon noticed a difference."

Although Mr Marsland cannot scientifically prove his improvement, he can physically feel the effects.

He now feels confident and able enough to drive at night and no longer needs to use his high intensity light when reading.

Mr Marsland said: "Macushield has changed my life, I'm so pleased to have found it and so is Nina, because the situation has been a big strain on her too.

"But more awareness is still needed. The 30 million people affected by AMD figure is still set to double in the next 20 to 30 years.

"People over 60 need to go and have their eyes checked regularly because there are now ways to detect low macular protective pigment which could lead to AMD meaning prevention is much more possible."

Barbara McLaughlan, RNIB's eye health campaigns manager said: "There has long been conflicting opinion about whether vitamins and supplements can help to prevent AMD, halt its progression or improve sight in someone who already has it. We would recommend a healthy balanced diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables to help keep your eyes healthy. However, the single most important thing that someone can do to protect themselves against developing AMD in later life is to not smoke – smoking doubles your chances of developing AMD.

"For people who already have AMD, there is substantial evidence to show taking high doses of anti-oxidants and minerals could help to slow down the progression of the condition. In particular it could be helpful where someone has developed AMD in one eye and is keen to prevent it developing in the second eye. If you are in that position, speak to your doctor."

### AMD information

#### DEFINITIONS

**Macula:** Located in the centre of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

**'Dry' AMD:** Occurs when the light-sensitive cells in the macula slowly break down, gradually blurring central vision in the affected eye.

**'Wet' AMD:** Occurs when abnormal blood vessels behind the retina start to grow under the macula.

#### WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

**'Dry':** Once dry AMD reaches the advanced stage, no form of treatment can prevent vision loss. However, treatment can delay and possibly prevent intermediate AMD from progressing to loss of vision.

**'Wet':** Wet AMD can be treated with laser surgery, photodynamic therapy, and injections into the eye. None

of these treatments is a cure for wet AMD. The disease and loss of vision may progress despite treatment.

#### MORE INFORMATION:

The Macular Disease Society aims to build confidence and independence for those with central vision impairment. It has a helpline, support group information and conferences as well as a forum. Visit [www.maculardisease.org/default.asp](http://www.maculardisease.org/default.asp).