

# Living with geographic atrophy

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

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.

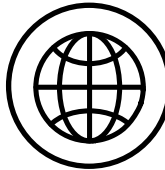
Each person's experience with GA is unique. This brochure is intended to be informational only and should not replace medical advice. Always talk to your doctor about any medical decisions.

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>



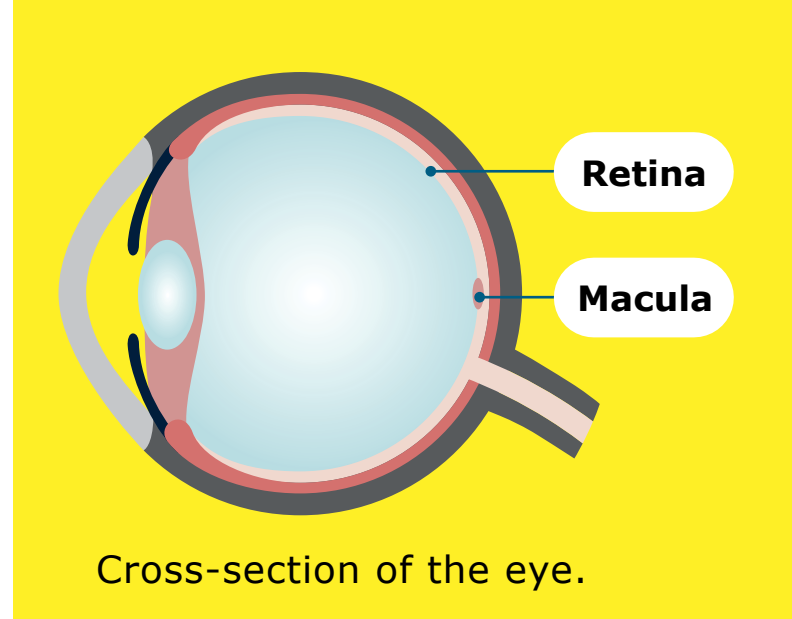
There are various strategies to help people adjust to living with GA.

# Understanding AMD

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) affects part of the retina called the **macula**, which is important for central vision.<sup>2</sup> It mainly develops in those over the age of 50.<sup>3</sup>

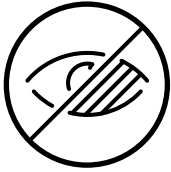
## AMD has stages:<sup>4</sup>

**Early/intermediate** - there may be no or mild symptoms, e.g. some blurriness and difficulty seeing in low light.



**Advanced** - manifests as geographic atrophy (GA) or wet AMD (also known as neovascular AMD).

# Advanced AMD



## Geographic atrophy

Cells in the macula degenerate and die (atrophy) over time, leading to blurry spots gradually developing in or near the centre of vision.<sup>1</sup>



## Wet AMD

Central vision quickly becomes blurry and distorted due to leakage of blood and fluid from abnormal blood vessels in the retina.<sup>2</sup>

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

Visit  
[dryamd.eu/about-amd](http://dryamd.eu/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.

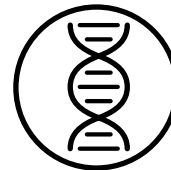
**Risk factors include:**<sup>1,2</sup>



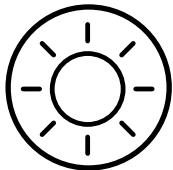
Ageing



History of smoking



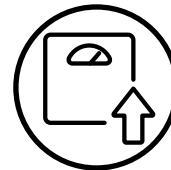
Family history



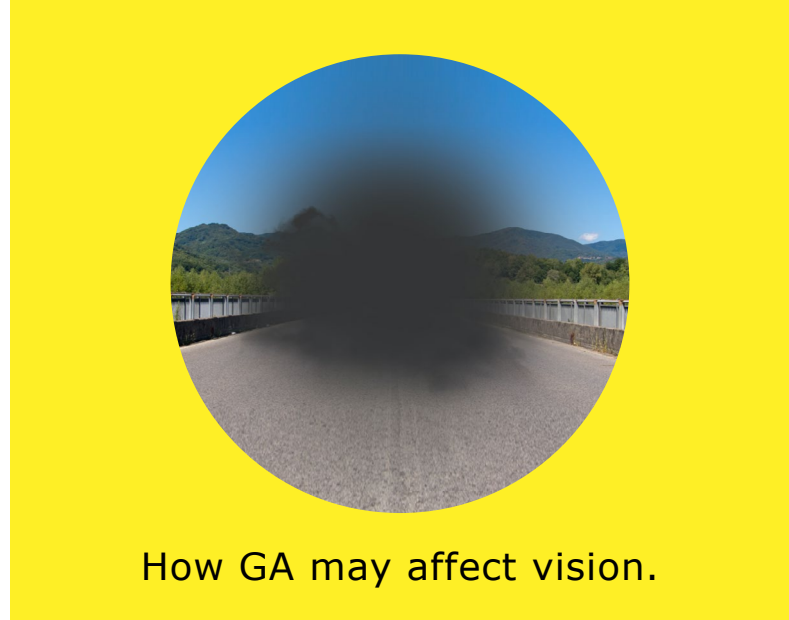
Sunlight exposure



High blood pressure and cholesterol



Obesity and low physical activity

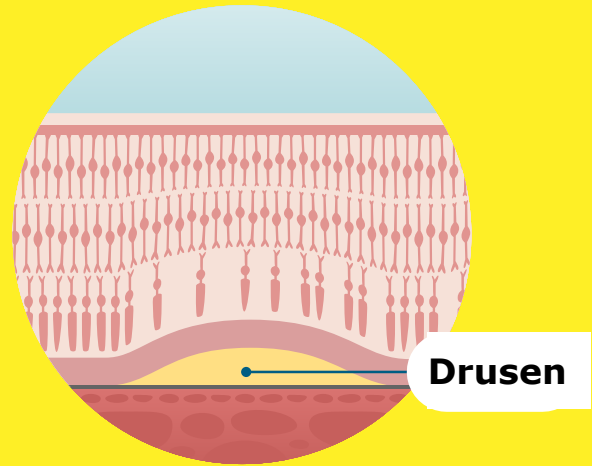


How GA may affect vision.

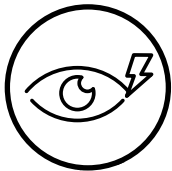
## How GA develops

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

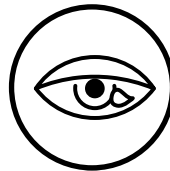
These are made up of proteins and fats that the body no longer needs.<sup>2</sup>



Cross-section of the macula.



Drusen may play a role in **overactivation** of parts of the immune system in the eye, causing inflammation.<sup>5</sup>



This inflammation can damage cells in the macula, forming **GA lesions**.<sup>5</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>1,2</sup>



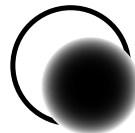
Blurry spots in or around  
centre of vision



Trouble reading and  
recognising faces



Difficulty seeing  
in the dark



Hazy or  
blurred vision



# Monitoring vision changes

It is important to attend all recommended eye exams.<sup>1</sup>

Your doctor may recommend using an Amsler grid to help you monitor your vision at home.<sup>1</sup>



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

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

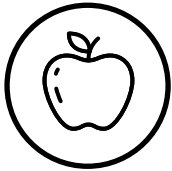
# Living well with GA

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



## Regular monitoring<sup>1</sup>

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



## Healthy habits<sup>1</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.eu/support-tools](https://dryamd.eu/support-tools)*  
to access a discussion  
guide to help prepare  
for your next visit with  
your doctor.

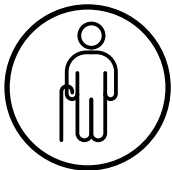
# Navigating vision loss

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

- Consider using a symbol cane
- 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](http://macularsociety.org)

### **PRO RETINA (Germany)**

Visit: [pro-retina.de](http://pro-retina.de)

### **Retina Suisse (Switzerland)**

Visit: [retina.ch](http://retina.ch)

### **Swedish Retinitis Pigmentosa Association**

Visit: [retinanytt.se](http://retinanytt.se)

# Glossary of terms

**Age-related macular degeneration (AMD):** An eye condition affecting the macula, common in those aged 50 and over.

**Amsler grid:** A self-monitoring tool your doctor might recommend to monitor your vision.

**Atrophy:** This is when cells waste away and die.

**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 to help the brain recognise what the eye is seeing.

# Do you have any more questions?

Visit [dryamd.eu](https://dryamd.eu) for further information and resources.

## References

1. BrightFocus Foundation. Available at: <https://www.brightfocus.org/macular/geographic-atrophy> (Accessed January 2024).
2. WebMD. Available at: <https://www.webmd.com/eye-health/what-is-geographic-atrophy> (Accessed January 2024).
3. Macular Society. Available at: <https://www.macularsociety.org/macular-disease/macular-conditions/age-related-macular-degeneration/> (Accessed January 2024).
4. EURETINA. Available at: <https://euretina.org/resource/euretina-whitebook-on-prevalence-incidence-and-healthcare-needs-for-retinal-diseases-in-europe/> (Accessed January 2024).
5. Boyer DS, et al. *Retina*. 2017;37(5):819–835.