

Geographic Atrophy **GA** can take away from your precious moments

Learn what you may expect



Every Geographic Atrophy (GA) journey is different, but knowing the basic facts can make GA less overwhelming. If you or someone you love has GA, this guide will give you a better understanding of what GA is and how it can impact vision, and tips for living with GA.

Every person's experience with GA is unique. The resources in this brochure are meant to be informational only and are not intended to replace medical advice. Always talk to your healthcare provider about any medical decisions, including how to manage the daily symptoms of GA and how your vision loss may affect your everyday life.

What Is Geographic Atrophy **GA**?

If you or someone you love has GA, you're not alone.



~5 million people globally are affected by GA



GA is an advanced form of dry **age-related macular degeneration**, or AMD

It can lead to permanent and irreversible vision loss that cannot be corrected with glasses or surgery.

Words that may be unfamiliar to you used in this booklet are in **boldface** type and defined in a glossary on page 9.

Understanding AMD and GA

AMD is an eye disease primarily found in people over the age of 50. When you have this condition, parts of the **macula** begin to thin, which can affect central vision. It's important to know that each of your eyes can be different. One eye may have AMD symptoms while the other may not.

GA is an advanced form of dry AMD. Recognizing the differences between early, intermediate, and advanced AMD (GA and wet AMD) can help you have better conversations with your (or your loved one's) eye doctor (optometrist, ophthalmologist, or retina specialist).

Early/intermediate AMD

- With early/intermediate AMD, you may not have symptoms at all, or you may have mild symptoms of blurriness and difficulty seeing in low light
- Even small changes in vision can mean the disease is getting worse

Early/intermediate AMD can lead to GA, wet AMD, or both GA and wet AMD.

GA (an advanced form of dry AMD) can develop as AMD progresses

- GA affects the **retina** – a thin layer of tissue lining the back of the eye that senses light, allowing you to see
- In GA, cells in the retina start to die, or atrophy; when your eye doctor looks at your retina, these regions of dead and dying cells look like areas on a map, which is why it's called "geographic atrophy"
- As it gets worse, it causes reduced vision and blurriness in the areas you are trying to focus on. Straight lines may also appear crooked
- GA can lead to permanent vision loss near the **fovea**, creating a blurry spot near the centre of your vision. This can make activities like reading and driving difficult, especially in low light or dark places
- GA is progressive and irreversible – vision changes due to GA get worse over time and cannot be corrected with glasses or through surgery

Wet AMD

- Wet AMD gets its "wet" distinction from abnormal blood vessels that may cause fluid or blood to leak into the macula
- Despite differences in how the disease progresses, both GA and wet AMD impact vision

How GA Develops in the Eye



Risk factors

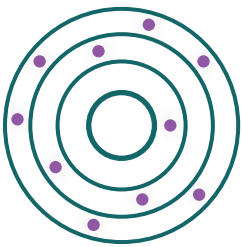
Family history (including genetics), aging, history of cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, obesity, low physical activity, and UV exposure can lead to AMD, which may progress to GA



- Risk factors can lead to a buildup of debris, called **drusen**, in the retina
- Drusen are made up of proteins and fats that the body no longer needs



- Drusen can contribute to an overactivation of parts of the immune system in the eye, causing inflammation
- This inflammation can damage cells in the macula, forming areas in the retina called **lesions**

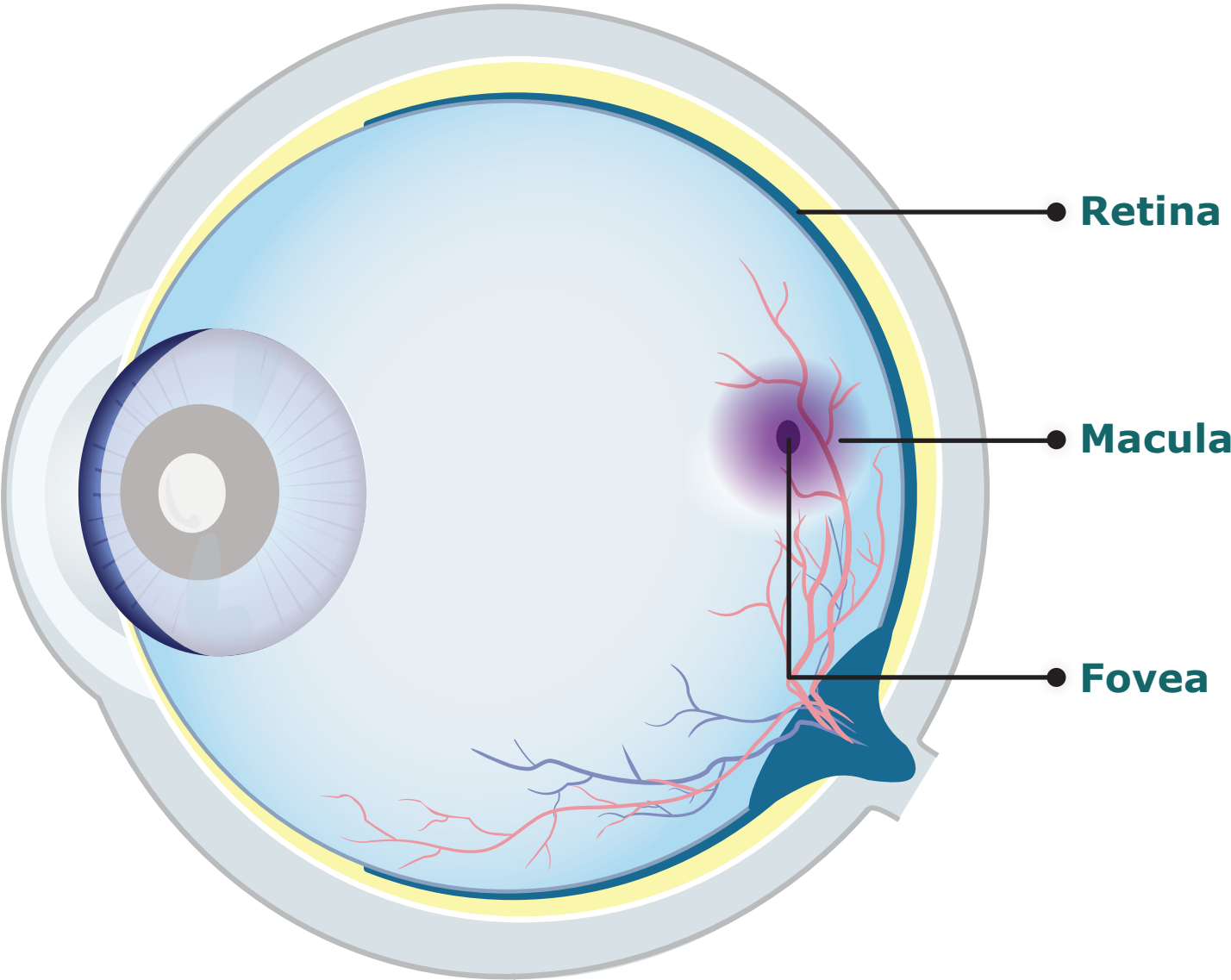


- Lesions start small, but as damage continues to progress, they can grow larger
- They may spread to parts of the macula, which is important for central vision
- As these lesions grow larger, GA worsens and can cause permanent vision loss

Scan the QR code with your phone's camera to learn more about GA



Inside Your Eye



Glossary

- **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD):** An eye disease primarily found in people over the age of 50. It can be either “wet” or “dry”. AMD can lead to reduced vision or blurriness, and in the advanced stage can be wet AMD, GA, or both
- **Drusen:** Buildup of debris in the retina that is made up of proteins and fats that the body no longer needs
- **Fovea:** A pit in the centre of the macula that helps create sharp, clear images of the things you focus on
- **Geographic atrophy (GA):** An advanced form of dry AMD. It can lead to permanent and irreversible vision changes that cannot be corrected with glasses or through surgery
- **Lesions:** Patches of damaged cells in the retina that occur with GA
- **Macula:** A tiny section of the retina. It helps you see detail
- **Retina:** Lines the back wall of the eye. It turns light into signals that help the brain recognize what you are seeing

How GA Can Impact Vision

Someone with GA may not notice changes in their vision when they look at an eye chart.

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

It's important to talk to your eye doctor about these vision changes to help them to better monitor the progression of GA.

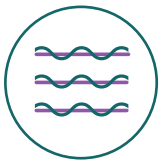
Some Signs and Symptoms of GA Include:



Difficulty seeing in the dark



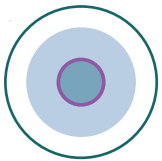
Hazy or blurred vision



Straight lines appearing crooked



Blurry spots in the centre of vision



Colours seeming dull or washed out

Talk to your eye doctor about any symptoms or any vision changes you notice.

Taking Care of Your Emotional Health

Your emotional health is just as important as your physical health. When you're dealing with vision changes, it's normal to feel anxious and fearful about what the future may hold.

Relaxation methods can control your body's anxiety response and help you think more clearly.



When you feel overwhelmed, try

- Simple, slow breathing exercises to help you relax
- Meditation to refocus your mind on the present

There are smartphone apps and other services that focus on helping people with their emotional health through the use of short, guided meditations.

If your loved one is experiencing vision changes, check in on their well-being. Let them know that you are there to support them through every step of their journey with GA.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you have anxiety or fears after a GA diagnosis.

Scan the QR code with your phone's camera to learn more about relaxation methods



Resources and Support

If you or someone you love has GA, it is important to know that you are not alone.

Below are some organizations that help people with vision diseases and those who care for them.



ccbnational.net



fightingblindness.ca/eyehealth/eye-diseases/age-related-macular-degeneration/



aqdm.org/index.html



BrightFocus.org/macular



PreventBlindness.org/geographic-atrophy



Check out support groups in your area to talk to others experiencing similar vision problems.

Please note:

The resources in this brochure are meant to be informational only and are not intended to replace medical advice. Apellis is not affiliated with, nor endorses, any particular organization, and it is not responsible for the content of any sites or resources we may link to from this brochure, and makes no guarantees about the accuracy of the information or the quality of support provided.

Scan the QR code with your phone's camera to learn more about patient advocacy groups



Do you have more questions?

Scan the QR code with
your phone's camera to visit
LivingWithGA.ca

