

Atrophic Age-related Macular Degeneration & Geographic Atrophy

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) has different stages and types including mild AMD, intermediate AMD, wet AMD, and atrophic AMD. Wet AMD and atrophic AMD are both advanced forms of the disease which can cause vision loss, and it is possible to have both advanced forms in the same eye.

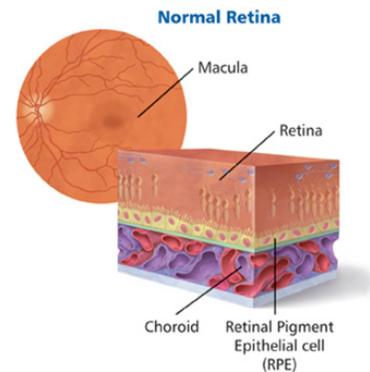
What does atrophy mean in AMD?

The retina is like the film in a camera and lines the back wall of the inside of your eye. Right behind the retina is a barrier layer called the retinal pigment epithelium (RPE) which is also important for the health of the retina. In atrophic AMD, the RPE cells become sick and degenerate, leaving patches of tissue with poor vision.

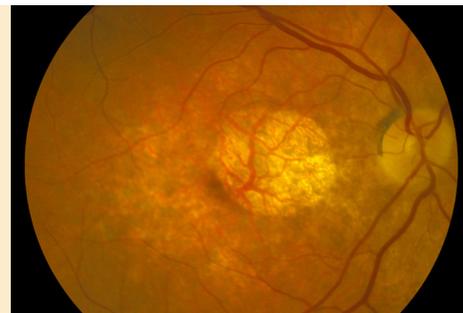
When atrophic AMD starts, the vision is often decreased in a non-specific manner. The vision is less clear, color and contrast are affected, and glasses do not help. This is equivalent to the film in the camera wearing thin right in the center but still functioning.

When atrophic AMD progresses further, it can result in geographic atrophy (GA), where discrete patches of the retina stop functioning entirely. This results in dark or missing spots in the vision.

Atrophic AMD can sometimes cause black “ink spots” that are briefly visible when waking up or when the lighting changes suddenly. Patients will also sometimes experience their vision “jumping” because their eye is rapidly moving around, trying to find a spot with clear vision but struggling because healthy areas of retina are irregular and patchy. There is no treatment available for these symptoms.



Intermediate dry AMD with patchy RPE atrophy



Advanced dry AMD with geographic atrophy



Diseases & Surgery of the Retina and Vitreous

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If GA is located away from the center of the retina, it may have very little impact on visual function, even if the affected region is large. Sometimes non-central GA will affect the peripheral vision in a way that impacts driving safety. If GA is located in the center of the retina, even a small patch of GA may profoundly limit visual function.

Atrophic AMD usually progresses over time. In many cases, the atrophy enlarges at about



GA sparing the center



GA involving the center

1-2% per year, but in some patients the atrophy progresses slower or faster than this. Your BARA doctor can explain how your GA is progressing, often with the aid of fundus autofluorescence images which highlight areas of atrophy.



Color photograph



Fundus autofluorescence

No FDA approved treatment is currently available for atrophic AMD. Several experimental medications are being evaluated in clinical trials, and BARA participates in many of these trials. Ask your BARA doctor if you could be eligible for a clinical trial for atrophic AMD.



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Bay Area Retina Associates is a group practice of retinal surgeons. All members of the group are board certified by the American Board of Ophthalmology and have completed fellowship training in the medical and surgical care of retinal diseases. All BARA surgeons have expertise in the treatment of common diseases such as AMD, diabetic retinopathy and retinal detachment, as well as rare diseases. BARA physicians see patients in eight offices around the East Bay, a community we have served for almost 40 years.