

cousin from Ireland who was in the country and who also had an appointment. These visits are a good way to help your family members understand your disease and how it is progressing.

MY STORY

Bleeding in the Right Eye—and Then the Left?

I used to think that the telltale sign of bleeding in the eye would be some wild vision distortion such as seeing a clock face as twisted, or print in a book or newspaper as a blur of crooked lines. But my retinologist always ended each visit by asking that I call if I noticed even a small change in either eye.

On my 77th birthday I was feeling very confident because I'd passed the vision test for renewing my driver's license two weeks earlier, much to my surprise. Yet I was trying not to admit to myself that something had changed in my right, "good," eye. That Sunday at church, where I gratefully use the large print program, for the first time I'd found that I could not read the ends of lines or see the music to sing. At home, glare from my computer screen had become intense. I had to change to different types of light bulbs in the dining room, where I have my morning coffee while I read the newspaper—which had suddenly become quite blurry with wavy lines. I was able to pinpoint the problem to my right eye because I was in the habit of testing my vision by reading the daily paper first with one

eye, then the other. I usually did vision checks throughout each day, too, by looking at stationary distant objects.

I did not want to make the call to the doctor because I was afraid, but my son's words about the importance of caring for my vision kept ringing in my ears, and I made the call after a few days. My retinologist looked at my dilated right eye and said he saw bleeding, the sign that my dry macular degeneration had turned into the wet kind. To confirm the diagnosis, he ordered a fluorescein angiogram with the dye and an OTC scan. The diagnosis was confirmed. The doctor said he was very surprised, because I was young to have developed the wet form of macular degeneration. He said he was amazed that I'd noticed the change because the bleeding was so slight, and he bemoaned the people who don't notice changes or put off seeing a doctor for six months—at which point, treatment is less able to help.

Before I left the office, treatment was started. I received an injection of Avastin in my right eye that we hoped would halt the bleeding so that my sight would stay at its present level. Almost immediately my vision actually improved, and when I went for my six-week checkup and another injection, we found that my vision had improved to the point that it had been before the bleeding. At the twelve-week point, my vision had continued to improve, but I had another injection as planned. Now, at the six-month point since my first injection, my right eye vision has remained stable and I have had no further injections. I continue to have OTC scans to check for bleeding every six weeks.

Shortly after the second injection, I noticed a change in my left eye when using the Amsler grid. This time I called the doctor's office immediately, and I got an appointment that same day. My retinologist saw no bleeding, and a fluorescein angiogram and OTC scan confirmed that the problem was further degeneration of cells in the macula.

Special Eye Vitamins for Macular Degeneration

Follow your doctor's recommendations about taking the vitamin supplement known as the AREDS formula. It is available over the counter in various versions. In addition to the original hard, orange tablets that are taken in doses of two in the morning and two in the evening, there are soft gelcaps. At first glance, the gelcaps may seem to cost more than the original tablets, but the dosage is only one in the morning and one in the evening, so the gelcaps end up costing less than the tablets.

Both the AREDS formula tablets and gelcaps contain beta-carotene (vitamin A), but not lutein (another naturally occurring carotenoid that aids in eyesight). Some manufacturers make a version of the AREDS formula that contains lutein, but not beta-carotene. This particular version can be difficult to identify because the supplement may not feature AREDS in its name. You may hear this type referred to as "smoker's AREDS," so called because smokers