

Wet macular degeneration & injection treatment

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Wet macular degeneration is a serious condition in which abnormal new blood vessels grow in between the layers of the retina and choroid (retina is the sensitive film at the back of the eye). These blood vessels can leak, bleed and cause scarring or water logging (called odema) in the retina. This leads to loss of vision in the area of the damaged retina. Unfortunately in most cases, this area, called macula, is responsible for central vision. The damaged retina caused by these leaky blood vessels ultimately leads to loss of central vision.

Patients suffering with wet macular degeneration may have central visual loss, blurring of vision, a grey or black patch in the centre of vision, distortion of straight lines etc. Most patients will complain of difficulty in reading.

Previous treatments for this eye disease were either not very effective or were very expensive. Treatments for this kind of eye disease have been developed in the last few years. One of the most effective and promising treatments is an injection of a anti VEGF drug into the eye. This may be Eylea (Aflibercept), Lucentis (Ranibizumab) or Avastin (Bevacizumab). However some patients may benefit from special types of laser treatment called Argon laser, photodynamic treatment (verteporfin with laser treatment) or even extensive laser surgery called vitreo retinal surgery.

Intravitreal injections of Eylea (Aflibercept), Lucentis (Ranibizumab) or Avastin (Bevacizumab) are now routinely given to try and stabilize vision and preserve as much vision as we can. The goal of treatment is to prevent further loss of vision. Although some patients will regain vision, the treatment may not restore vision that has already been lost, and may not ultimately prevent further loss of vision caused by the disease. The damage in the retina may be reduced by the injections but not totally reversed. Visual loss will be expected but hopefully not as much if the eye was not treated at all.

The patient usually undergoes tests which include a colour photograph of the retina, a dye test and a scan of the retina. If there are signs of wet macular degeneration that are expected to benefit from treatment, then the patient undergoes 3 injections of anti VEGF treatment (one injection each month for 3 months). The patient then enters an observation

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period and will then be offered treatment only if it is required.

This injection is given directly into the eye (in the jelly of the eye), by an eye surgeon or a person trained for eye injections. The eye will be sore for a while and the vision will be blurred for a period of time after which it will clear to previous levels.

The chances of stabilization of the vision are upto 80% in patients with certain types of wet macular degeneration. In approximately 20% the treatment will not work and the vision will drop. The damage caused by leakage and fluid may be minimised but the ageing changes cannot be stopped.

In most cases, patients do not have any problems after the injection. Sometimes the front surface of the eye can get scratched (corneal abrasion), which can cause eye pain/soreness but settles down in a day. Rarely, patients can get an infection in the eye, called endophthalmitis, which can cause permanent & total loss of vision.

Possible complications and side effects of the procedure and administration of Lucentis include retinal detachment, cataract formation (clouding of the lens of the eye), glaucoma (increased pressure in the eye), hypotony (reduced pressure in the eye), damage to the retina or cornea (structures of the eye), and bleeding. Any of these rare complications may lead to severe, permanent loss of vision. Other complications not listed here may cause pain, soreness or decreased vision in the eye being treated. Some evidence is emerging about possible risk of stroke or heart problems.

Summary

Benefits: Possible stabilization of vision

Risks: Frequent injections into the eye which may be painful, complications that may cause permanent loss of sight, failure of treatment

Recommended patient groups

Macular disease society <http://www.maculardisease.org/> helpline 0845 241 2041

Surrey society of the visual impaired. (SAVI) <http://www.surreywebsight.org.uk/>

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