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Retinal diseases leading cause of chronic blindness

Express Features

The blind population in India is estimated to rise to 15 million by 2020. While diseases related to the cornea (front of the eye) are commonly known, diseases related to the retina (back of the eye) are not easily recognised. Retinal diseases account for a significant share of the vision loss burden, compared to other eye-related diseases that can cause blindness.

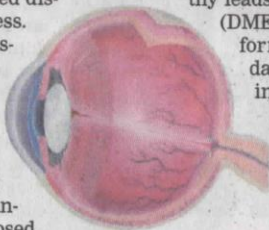
Of the various retinal disorders, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic macular edema (DME) are two progressive diseases that causes loss of vision. AMD and DME can be effectively managed if patients are diagnosed in a timely manner. Therefore, it is important to understand the underlying symptoms associated with the diseases to identify them at an early stage.

Understanding Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) and Diabetic Macular Edema (DME)

Retina is that part of the eye where the final vision is formed, the way it is creat-

ed on a film inside a camera. If the retina is damaged, the vision is automatically affected.

Age-related macular degeneration is one of the important causes of severe visual loss in the elderly population. It constitutes to 8.7 per cent of blindness in the world. Diabetic Retinopathy damages blood vessels inside the retina at the back of the eye. It constitutes 4.8 per cent of blindness in the world. Diabetic Retinopathy leads to Diabetic Macular Edema (DME) which is the most common form of DR. It occurs when the damaged blood vessels leak into the macula of the retina causing it to swell thereby creating visibility problem in the normal vision.



Timely diagnosis & Treatment Protocol

Dr Sribhargava Natash, director and vitreoretinal consultant at Nethra Eye Hospital, says, "50-60 per cent of patients present in a retina clinic with retinal disorder symptoms, are already in an advanced stage of the disease. When younger population suffering with diabetes is diagnosed of Diabetic Retinopathy they

are at risk of losing vision due to Diabetic Macular Edema. This results in the loss of productive years of life, so apart from physical morbidity, there are emotional and economic implications. Timely diagnosis can help patients catch up with the disease early and improve quality of life. This can happen only when the patient or caregiver understands the symptoms and seeks expert advice on time. Retinal diseases can be managed effectively with quality care treatment."

Dr Raja Narayanan, secretary of VRSI & head of clinical research, LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad, says, "Patients need to be alert in recognising early signs and symptoms of retinal diseases. Most often, the symptoms of AMD are confused with old age. Diabetics are advised to visit an ophthalmologist/retinologist every six months, as they are at a higher risk of developing diabetic retinopathy. Early detection of AMD and DME increases the possibility of preventing vision loss. Today, there are treatments available that can slow or halt disease progression. Some of the treatment options available in India include laser photocoagulation, anti-VEGF (Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor) injections and combination therapy which includes laser treatment.