

Complimentary Treatments Strategies for Macular Degeneration

Two perspectives on macular degeneration

Modern medicine defines Macular Degeneration is the slow deterioration of the cells in the macula, a tiny yellowish area near the center of the retina where vision is the most precise. Ninety percent of people with macular degeneration have the dry type, in which small, yellow spots called drusens form underneath the macular. Drusens are believed to be waste products that accumulate because of lack of antioxidants to clear the waste from the eyes. The drusen slowly break down the cells in the macular, causing distorted vision. In the wet type, new, abnormal blood vessels begin to grow toward the macular.

In Chinese Medicine healthy vision is dependant on a number of factors. Specifically, the eyes relate intimately with the function of the Liver and Kidneys. In CM these organs are like the batteries which store vital energy and blood which nourish the eyes. There are a number of factors which compromise the function of these organs, and hence vision. The following treatment strategies therefore focuses on **addressing some of the constitutional factors** involved in MD, as well as **increasing the circulation and distribution of nutrients to the eyes**.

Strategy #1 Medical Assessment and Options for Intervention

If wet type MD should be diagnosed the preferred intervention is called **Photodynamic Therapy (PVT)** is used now to help seal leaky blood vessels in the retina. This procedure is generally much less damaging than traditional laser treatments in its ability to target abnormal blood vessels, and avoid damaging retinal cells.

Doctors are now using injectable **antiangiogenesis drugs** into the retina for wet macular degeneration. These drugs help prevent the body from growing new blood vessels in the retina which are the ones that leak for those with wet macular degeneration. Macugen is one of the more common drugs being injected, though Lucentis and Avastin are considered more effective treatment strategies. The best results so far have in studies have been to use a combination of Lucentis and PVT to help stabilize wet macular degeneration. These options are preferred to laser therapies which hold a potential risk to the retina.

Regardless of medical diagnosis it is important to realize the limits of the structural and reductionist bias of allopathic medicine in treating complex syndromes. The eyes are connected to a whole person who has tremendous influence over a dis – ease process. More on this later.

Strategy #2 - Nutritional support

As mentioned previously in CM the liver and kidneys act as batteries which energize and nourish sight. It is our digestive capacity (in combination with cardio) which recharges the batteries. Poor or incomplete digestion is often at the root of many chronic or degenerative processes seen in the west. In this regard we will address nutrition thru:

- **Chinese herbal preparations** that nourish essence/blood and support the up bearing Qi.(which holds blood in the vessels)
- **Specific supplements and super foods** which nourish the macula
- **Antioxidants** which clear out metabolic waste and prevent further damage to light sensitive cells and vessels in the eyes

These will be discussed in detail in a separate meeting and outline.

Strategy # 3 increasing circulation in the eyes

Increasing micro circulation in the eyes is imperative for delivering nutrition to the macula and restoring vision. The following are some suggestions on how to accomplish this:

- **Daily Micro – current stimulation** - MicroCurrent Stimulation (MCS) is an enhanced adaptation of a FDA approved therapy used by anesthesiologists, orthopedic surgeons, plastic surgeons and rehabilitative specialists to promote the healing of wounds and transplanted tissues as well as to treat pain. In general, the theory of how MCS works is that it helps 1) re-stimulate and energize dormant retinal cells (cells are like batteries -- when they run low in energy, they become sluggish and dormant), 2) boost the cells' ability to rid themselves of waste products (waste interferes with the flow of energy, nutrients and communication), 3) increase blood supply to the area stimulated. By increasing blood flow to the area, cells and tissues still living can get nourished and refreshed.
- **Daily eye exercises**
- **Acupuncture stimulation** in and around the orbit of the eye initially once or twice a week

Strategy #4 - Lifestyle considerations

The mind and body are intimately woven and are constantly influencing each other. The food we eat, the company we keep, our thoughts feelings and beliefs all contribute the totality of who we are. While modern medicine might dismiss macular degeneration as an inevitable result of aging, it is without a doubt the biggest mistake to not look any deeper for answers or solutions. The following are some areas to focus on:

- **Diet** – As mentioned above, the quality of nutrition and our digestive capacity determine what is available for macular health. Specific dietary suggestions and prohibitions will be offered in a future meeting and document.
- **Working with stress and fear** – Stress has a profound influence on the body which is characterized by tension. This tension inhibits normal metabolic functions and micro circulation to the eyes. A negative feed back loop is very common in health situations where stress is a factor – Stress creates tension, which exacerbates symptoms downstream, which heightens anxiety, which creates more stress...and so on. Disciplines that interrupt the tension cycle - yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, progressive deep muscle relaxation, breathing exercises – are extremely helpful for restoring homeostasis. Being conscious of stressors in life and minimizing them is imperative.
- **Vision is more than sight** – In the inner tradition of CM physical symptoms can be pointers back to more fundamental issues located in consciousness itself. Vision is said to relate to not only to physical sight but also to a sense of spiritual direction forward. This can be interpreted widely as a movement toward some more fundamental truth beyond the ego or physical world of things. Many traditions from around the world describe this symbolically as a journey from the head to the heart. There are many ways to walk this journey and it is important to find one that speaks to you. Be open and curious to the messages, feelings and inspirations that come with symptoms