

## LUTHERAN HEALTH MINISTRIES of the FOOTHILLS

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The Sunday before I wrote this article, the Gospel lesson from John told us the story of Jesus healing the blind man. Would that we could all have perfect sight, both in matters of faith and physically!

A number of the people I visit as parish nurse have problems with macular degeneration, which is the leading cause of significant vision loss in our older population. We don't know its exact causes, but some risk factors include age, family history of macular degeneration, race (it is more common in whites), sex (it is more common in women), cigarette smoking, obesity, light-colored eyes, exposure to sunlight, low levels of certain nutrients, and cardiovascular disease (i.e., high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack).

What can we do to reduce the risk of developing macular degeneration? There are obviously some risk factors that we can't change. There are, however, a number of things we **can** do that may help to delay or prevent vision loss.

The single most preventable cause of macular degeneration is **cigarette smoking**. Stopping smoking is also probably the hardest lifestyle change to make! Fortunately, there are programs and medications now that can help in the struggle. Ask your doctor for help.

**Regular eye exams** help detect signs of macular degeneration. Although vision damage can't be reversed, the progression of the degeneration can be slowed. If you have a family history of macular degeneration you should have an eye exam annually or as often as recommended by your doctor.

Wearing **good quality sunglasses** that filter out UVA and UVB light may also help. Wearing sunglasses may also reduce your risk of cataracts.

Other than not smoking, **eating a nutritionally balanced diet** may be the most important thing we can do to reduce our risk of macular degeneration. A low fat diet with plenty of dark green and orange vegetables and fruits, and fish with omega-3 fatty acids may help protect our eyes. Such a diet also helps maintain a healthy weight, and along with exercise, helps manage cardiovascular health.

I pray that each of you may have the vision to see Christ and His desires for our lives.

Shalom!