

# Smoking Can Lead to Vision Loss or Blindness

## Eye Disease and Smoking

---

Smoking has long been known to cause heart disease and lung cancer however many people don't realize that smoking can lead to vision loss. Studies show smoking increases the risk of age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy and Dry Eye Syndrome.

- **Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)**  
One way to reduce the risk of developing AMD is by NOT smoking. Smokers are three to four times more likely to develop AMD than nonsmokers. Nonsmokers living with smokers almost double their risk of developing AMD.
- **Cataracts**  
Heavy smokers (15 cigarettes/day or more) have up to three times the risk of cataracts as nonsmokers.
- **Glaucoma**  
There is a strong link between smoking and high blood pressure, cataracts and diabetes, all of which are risk factors for glaucoma.
- **Diabetic Retinopathy**  
Smoking can increase your chances of getting diabetes. It can also make managing diabetes more difficult for those who already have it. Complications of diabetes made worse by smoking include retinopathy, heart disease, stroke, vascular disease, kidney disease, nerve damage, foot problems and many others.
- **Dry Eye Syndrome**  
Dry Eye Syndrome is more than twice as likely to impact smokers as nonsmokers.

## What You Can Do to Prevent Vision Loss

---

Healthy habits can lead to healthy eyes. The risk of eye disease and vision loss can be lowered if you:

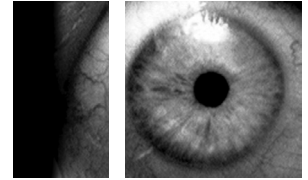
- **Quit smoking!**
- **Eat healthy foods** (including green leafy vegetables, fruits and foods high in vitamins C, E, and beta carotene)
- **Control blood pressure and cholesterol**
- **Stay active**
- **Visit your eye care professional regularly**

## Are You Ready to Quit?

---

To get started, visit the **How to Quit** page on the NYS Smokers' Quitline website ([www.nysmokefree.com](http://www.nysmokefree.com)) or call the NYS Smokers' Quitline for help (**1-866-NY-QUITS** or 1-866-697-8487).  
**See your doctor.** He or she may prescribe a nicotine replacement therapy or other medication.

# Description of Eye Diseases Associated with Smoking



## Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

---

AMD begins as a loss of central vision which makes it difficult to read and see fine details. Over time, vision loss increases significantly. Of the two types of AMD, "dry" and "wet," dry AMD is the most common. In dry AMD, fatty deposits form under the light-sensing cells in the back of the eye (retina). Vision loss in dry AMD usually gets worse slowly. In wet AMD, tiny blood vessels under the retina leak or break open. This changes vision and causes scar tissue to form. Wet AMD is less common, but more quickly harmful to vision.

## Glaucoma

---

Glaucoma causes a gradual breakdown of the cells that make up the nerve in your eye that sends visual information to your brain (optic nerve). As the nerve cells die, vision is slowly lost, usually beginning with side vision. Often the loss of vision is not noticeable until a large amount of nerve damage has occurred. This is the reason why as many as half of all people with glaucoma may be unaware that they have it.

## Cataracts

---

A cataract is a clouding of the eye's naturally clear lens. It usually gets worse as we get older. Most cataracts are related to aging. Cataracts are very common in older people. By age 80, more than half of all Americans either have a cataract or have had cataract surgery.

## Diabetic Retinopathy

---

Diabetic retinopathy is a common complication of diabetes. It affects the tiny blood vessels of the retina in the eye. Retinal blood vessels can break down, leak or become blocked and this can affect vision over time. In some people with diabetic retinopathy, serious damage to the eye can occur when new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina.

## Dry Eye Syndrome

---

Dry Eye Syndrome is an eye disease that appears as damaged blood vessels in the eye. This can lead to eye irritation, itchy and scratchy eyes, and burning sensation of the eyes.