

Jane Seymour's

VISION OF SAVING SIGHT



GOLDEN GLOBE AND EMMY AWARD-WINNER JANE SEYMOUR has added a new role to her long list of credits, which includes the James Bond thriller *Live and Let Die* and CBS' *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. She's the spokeswoman for a drive to help adults ages 40 to 69 fend off the vision-harming effects of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

The British-born actress says she decided to lead this crusade after watching her mother, Meike, who died in 2007, slowly lose her eyesight to the disorder.

"As my mother's eyesight deteriorated, she could no longer recognize the faces of her friends, and she couldn't even read without using a special magnifying glass," Ms. Seymour says. "That was quite painful for her."

To learn more about the dire impact of AMD, Ms. Seymour took part in "a day without sight." She wore a special pair of glasses that mimicked AMD's sight-damaging effects.

"I struggled all day long," she recalls. "It was almost impossible to read anything. And I really saw the impact of AMD when I failed to recognize a close friend's face, even while standing only a few feet away."

Ms. Seymour's "Don't Lose Sight" campaign is meant to

persuade older Americans to get eye checkups each year. It's sponsored by the nonprofit Prevent Blindness America.

"Although there's no cure for AMD, I'm greatly encouraged about recent advances that will help to curb its effects," Ms. Seymour says.

Our leading threat to sight

AMD affects more than 15 million Americans. It's the top U.S. cause of major vision loss. The disorder rarely causes complete blindness. But it can rob people of the healthy central vision they need for such daily tasks as driving, reading or recognizing a friend's face.

"AMD usually occurs in those older than 50, and it usually progresses slowly," says New York City ophthalmologist Michael Cooney, M.D. "Because it often takes years for vision to be noticeably impaired, many people don't realize they have the disorder until the damage has already been done."

AMD affects the light-sensitive tissues at the back of the eye (in the macula). There are 2 types of the eye disorder. "Wet" AMD occurs when new blood vessels behind the retina grow toward the macula. New blood vessels are very fragile and often leak fluid and blood under the macula. This rapidly deteriorates the macula and leads to rapid loss of central vision. This type occurs in only 10 percent of all people struck with the disease,

but accounts for 90 percent of all severe vision loss from AMD.

In the more common but less serious "dry" AMD, a buildup of waste products causes the light-sensitive cells in the macula to slowly break down over a period of time. As this occurs, loss of vision occurs. Although most cases of dry AMD get worse over years, wet AMD can cause severe sight loss in months.

Treating AMD

Treatment options vary depending on the type of AMD. Lasers can be used to seal or stop the growth of leaky or abnormal blood vessels that cause wet AMD. Those treatments don't work with dry AMD.

Some studies show that AMD patients can slow vision loss by including lots of antioxidants (such as vitamins A, C and E) in their diets or taking supplements that provide them. Studies also show that raising the intake of lutein and omega-3 fatty acids can slow AMD in many patients. Lutein is found in green, leafy vegetables. Omega-3s are found in cold-water fish.

Risk factors for AMD include a family history of the disorder, advancing age, smoking and poor nutrition.

"There's no doubt that advanced AMD can destroy quality of life," says Dr. Cooney. "As I tell all my older patients: Eyes need good nutrition to stay healthy, in the same way bones need calcium."

HAVE YOU HAD A *Diabetic Eye Exam?*

If you have diabetes, the American Optometric Association advises you to have a dilated eye exam once a year. This simple test can help your eye doctor find diabetic eye disease, which can cause blindness if left untreated. Diabetic eye disease, also called diabetic retinopathy, is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among American adults. In its early stage, it can be treated by various techniques, including laser therapy.

You can greatly reduce your risk for vision loss from diabetic eye disease by managing your diabetes. Keep your medical appointments and follow your doctor's treatment plan. Be sure to tell your eye doctor if you have diabetes so you can have a diabetic eye exam. Ask him or her for the results and give them to your doctor. Most health plans cover this test. Contact Member Services if you have questions about this benefit.

