



SMOKING YOUR SIGHT AWAY: BLIND TO REALITY!

Many people know that smoking causes a range of very serious and often fatal diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease. But do smokers also know they could be at risk from losing their eye sight too?

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the commonest cause of blindness in the UK, affecting the retina at the back of the eye and causing severe irreversible loss of central vision. **Research suggests that smokers have three to four fold increased risk of developing AMD compared with non-smokers.**

A recent editorial in the British Medical Journal estimated that 53,900 people may have visual impairment due to smoking-related AMD in the UK. Of these, 17,800 are blind from AMD attributable to smoking. Moreover, smokers may develop AMD 10 years earlier than non-smokers.

Research evidence also suggests that smoking produces a three-fold increase on the risk of developing nuclear cataract.

A survey carried out in the North West of England of over 400 patients found that very few patients attending eye clinics and other out-patient departments were aware of the risks that smoking causes blindness.

Mr. Simon Kelly, an ophthalmologist in Bolton who led that study said *"It seems that patients are unaware of the ocular hazards of smoking. Many of my patients with AMD are shocked when they learn that smoking might have been a factor in their visual problems. More people might quit smoking if they realized that it can also lead to blindness"*. Mrs. Pauline Edwards a patient of Mr. Kelly's was a hardened smoker consuming 60 cigarettes a day for over 30 years, said *"When I heard that smoking might be robbing me of my eyesight because of damage to the macula, I quit. I was a nursing sister in Salford for over 20 years and was aware of all the problems that smoking caused but was truly stunned to hear that I was at risk of blindness from smoking. People need to know"*.

However, there is good news. Former smokers have only a slightly increased risk of AMD thus giving up smoking both reduces the risk of losing your eye-sight and improves your chances of living a long life with good vision.

For more information contact North West Action on Smoking and Health on 0161 762 3166 or visit our website at www.nwash.co.uk where you can download a brochure on smoking and eye disease.