

## Early detection of macular degeneration possible

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**LEE COUNTY:** Macular degeneration is a disease that gradually destroys your central vision and affects everyday things like driving, reading or watching TV. Now, a new DNA test can tell patients if they're at risk and early detection can make all the difference.

At first glance it doesn't look like a high-tech test, but the saliva collected in a test tube could change Patricia Thel's life.

"Actually, it was extremely simple," she said. "It's definitely something I feel like I need to know."

The new DNA test will tell Thel the chances of her losing her sight. It's called "macula risk" and it uses saliva samples to look for certain genetic markers known to be responsible for vision loss.

Thel's father lost his sight to macular degeneration and she's already experienced early signs of it.

"When I would read small print, I would notice that in the center of my vision in my right eye the print seemed to disappear," she said.

Dr. Paul Raskauskas say the test will allow high risk patients to begin regular check-ups and treatments sooner.

"If you're concerned about macular degeneration, there's a way to check for it at home just by using the blinds on your window or by keeping one of these grids on hand. Look at the lines. If they start to blur or become distorted, there's a problem," he said. "The key thing is catching it early."

If a problem is detected, the new test will give doctors a clearer picture at how serious it could become in the future so they can help patients now.

"If they come in when the vision is already poor, we only have a 30 percent chance of bringing vision back," said Dr. Raskauskas. "The earlier diagnosis can be made and treatment can be started, that will determine preservation of your vision and that's huge."

The test is not covered by insurance and it costs \$399.

[Click here](#) for more information on macular degeneration. Through this link, you can also get one those grids that can help you test your own vision at home.

If you're a patient on Medicare, you're covered no matter what the results are.

And for younger patients, there's a lot of work being done in the Washington to make it illegal for insurance companies, or even employers, to discriminate based on the results of any genetic testing.

That hasn't been resolved though. So your best bet is just to check with your insurance company



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