

What Is Avastin®?

Avastin® is the brand name for bevacizumab, a drug injected into the eye to slow vision loss in people who have “wet” age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

Avastin is part of a class of drugs that block the growth of abnormal blood vessels, which is the cause of wet [age-related macular degeneration \(AMD\)](#). Avastin is also used in some cases to treat macular edema, or swelling of the macula, often associated with [diabetic retinopathy](#).

Avastin was initially approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a treatment for different types of cancer. Its use to treat eye disease is considered an “off-label” use. The FDA allows the use of drugs for conditions other than those for which it is approved if doctors are well informed about the product and proof has been shown of the drug’s positive effects.

Another drug, Lucentis® (ranibizumab), is chemically similar to Avastin and has been approved by the FDA to treat wet AMD. Based on a study funded by the National Eye Institute (NEI), a part of the federal National Institutes of Health (NIH), [the two drugs have equal effect on visual acuity](#).

How Does Avastin® Work?

For abnormal blood vessels to grow in your eye, they need a chemical called vascular endothelial growth factor, or VEGF. Avastin® blocks the production of VEGF, thus slowing the growth of blood vessels in the eye that can leak and cause vision loss. The drugs that block the trouble-causing VEGF are called anti-VEGF drugs.

What Conditions Are Treated with Avastin®?

Avastin® is used for the treatment of wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

[Age-related macular degeneration \(AMD\)](#) is the leading cause of vision loss in people 50 years or older in the United States. This condition damages the macula, which is located in the center of the retina and enables you to see fine details clearly. You rely on your macula whenever you read, drive, or do other activities that require you to focus on precise details. A person with AMD loses the ability to perceive fine details both up close and at a distance. This vision loss usually affects only your central vision.

There are two types of AMD. About 90% of people with AMD have the atrophic or “dry” form of AMD, which develops when the tissues of the macula grow thin with age. About 10% have the exudative or “wet” form of AMD. With wet AMD, abnormal blood vessels grow underneath the retina. These unhealthy vessels leak blood and fluid, which can scar the macula. Vision loss can be rapid and severe. Avastin is not effective for the treatment of dry AMD.

Avastin is also used to treat [macular edema](#) that results from [central retinal vein occlusion \(CRVO\)](#) or [branch retinal vein occlusion \(BRVO\)](#). The drug may also be used for the treatment of macular edema due to [diabetic retinopathy](#).

What Happens During Treatment with Avastin®?

Your ophthalmologist administers the Avastin® directly to your eye in an outpatient procedure.

Before the procedure, your [ophthalmologist \(Eye M.D.\)](#) will clean your eye to prevent infection and will use an anesthetic to numb your eye. The drug is then placed in the back of your eye with a very fine needle, passed through the white part of your eye. Generally, you do not see the needle itself. You may receive multiple Avastin injections over the course of many months. Repeat treatments are often needed for continued benefit.

In some cases, your Eye M.D. may recommend combining Avastin treatment with other [wet AMD treatments](#). The treatment that's right for you will depend on your specific condition.

What Are the Risks of Avastin® Treatment?

Every treatment has the potential for side effects. You should understand the benefits and risks of any treatment you are considering.

Avastin® may cause serious eye problems, including serious eye infection, [detached retina](#) and [cataracts](#). Other side effects may include:

- Redness;
- Light sensitivity;
- Pain;
- Changes in vision, including blurring and double vision;
- Dry or itchy eyes; and
- Feeling of something in your eye

You should contact your ophthalmologist immediately if you experience any of these problems within a few days of Avastin treatment.