

Information From Your Eye M.D.

DIABETES AND YOUR EYES

Approximately 16 million Americans have diabetes. Diabetes can affect your eyes. Five million may lose their vision because they didn't know they had the disease. Each year, 12,000 to 24,000 people lose their sight because of diabetes.

Diabetic eye disease, eye problems that affect those with diabetes, include diabetic retinopathy, cataracts and glaucoma. The most common of these is diabetic retinopathy, the leading cause of new cases of blindness among working age people in the United States. People with diabetes are more likely to get cataracts at a younger age and are twice as likely to develop glaucoma.

What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a potentially vision-threatening condition in which the blood vessels inside the retina (the area of light-sensitive cells that line the back of the eye) become damaged. These damaged vessels can then leak, bleed or scar and cause retinal detachment, hemorrhaging or macular edema, conditions which can damage vision. The longer you have diabetes, the greater your chance of developing diabetic retinopathy. More than one third of those diagnosed with diabetes don't get the recommended vision care.

Recommended Care

If you are diagnosed with diabetes, schedule a complete dilated eye examination with your Eye M.D. at least once a year. (During a "dilated" exam, your doctor uses eye drops to widen your pupil, making it easier to exam your retina.) Your Eye M.D. will recommend more frequent examinations if problems are detected.

Women with diabetes should also be examined if they are planning to become pregnant, are early in the first trimester and every one to three months during pregnancy because diabetic retinopathy can worsen much more rapidly during pregnancy.

Recent studies show that controlling diabetes by self-monitoring blood sugar levels and multiple daily insulin injections or using an insulin pump can slow the development of diabetic retinopathy and other complications of diabetes. As always, early diagnosis of diabetes and effectively controlling blood sugar levels and high blood pressure through diet, exercise and proper medication can help control eye diseases associated with diabetes.

Symptoms

There are often no symptoms in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy and your vision may not be affected until the disease worsens.

You should also see your Eye M.D. (ophthalmologist) immediately if you experience:

- Blurred vision that lasts more than a few days
- Blurred vision that is not associated with a change in blood sugar
- Floaters

Treatment

An effective partnership between you, your primary care physician and your Eye M.D. is necessary to make sure proper eye care and treatment is provided.

The current main treatment option for diabetic retinopathy is laser photocoagulation. In this treatment, the “focal” laser helps to close leaking blood vessels, which lead to macular edema. The Eye M.D. uses a special “pan retinal” laser to make tiny burns on the retina surface removing damaged retinal tissue. This helps to stop or prevent growth of abnormal blood vessels that cause bleeding and retinal detachment. When performed promptly, laser photocoagulation helps reduce the risk of severe vision loss by up to 90 percent.

Where Can I Get More Information?

Your Eye M.D. is the best source of information on diabetic eye disease, as well as eye health and safety.

If you would like more information on diabetic eye disease, please visit the American Academy of Ophthalmology's public information Web site at www.medem.com/eyemd.

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