

Information From Your Eye M.D.

DIABETIC EYE DISEASE

Approximately 16 million Americans have diabetes. And 5 million are at risk for vision loss because they don't know they have the disease. Each year, 12,000 to 24,000 individuals lose their sight due to diabetes.

Diabetic eye disease, a group of eye problems that affect those with diabetes, includes 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.

If you have diabetes, you are likely to get cataracts at a younger age and your chances of developing glaucoma are doubled.

What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a potentially vision threatening condition in which the blood vessels inside the retina become damaged from the high blood sugar levels associated with diabetes. 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

Once diagnosed with diabetes, schedule a comprehensive dilated eye evaluation with your Eye M.D. at least once a year. Your Eye M.D. will recommend more frequent examinations if abnormalities are detected.

Women with diabetes should also be examined if considering pregnancy, early in the first trimester and every 1 to 3 months during pregnancy because diabetic retinopathy can progress much more rapidly during pregnancy.

Recent studies show that intensive control of diabetes with self-monitoring of blood sugar levels and multiple daily insulin injections or an insulin pump can significantly slow the development of diabetic retinopathy and other complications from diabetes. As always, early diagnosis of diabetes and the effective control of blood sugar levels and hypertension through diet and exercise can help control eye diseases associated with diabetes.

Symptoms

Because there are often no symptoms in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy, your vision may not be affected until the disease becomes severe.

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

- Blurred vision that last 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 essential to assure proper eye care and treatment.

The current primary treatment option for diabetic retinopathy is laser photocoagulation. With the “pan retinal” laser, the Eye M.D. makes tiny burns on the retina surface removing damaged retinal tissue. This helps to stop or prevent growth of abnormal blood vessels that cause vitreous hemorrhage and retinal detachment. The “focal” laser helps to close leaking blood vessels, which lead to macular edema. 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.

Approved by: The Eye Health and Public Information Task Force
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