



Diabetic Retinopathy

Prevention
is the key
to saving
your sight.

By Jonna Jefferis & Daniel Levy, O.D.

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye disease that develops among some people who have diabetes. High levels of blood sugar associated with diabetes can cause serious health problems, including diabetic retinopathy. In addition to people with diabetes, those with a family history of diabetes or an African-American or Hispanic background are at the greatest risk for developing diabetic retinopathy.

In the early stages of diabetic retinopathy, small blood vessels in the eye swell. If left untreated, diabetic retinopathy moves into the advanced stage. Abnormal blood vessels begin to grow and leak fluid. Ultimately, this can cause vision loss.

It is very important for all diabetics to obtain regular eye exams including dilation. Diabetic retinopathy can develop without any symptoms. Some people do experience symptoms, which require follow-up with an eye care professional. These include:

- Blurry vision
- Difficulty reading
- A sudden loss of vision in one or both eyes
- Seeing dark spots, flashing lights or rings around lights

During the disease's early stages, treatment is usually unnecessary. For advanced diabetic retinopathy, several effective treatments are available:

- Laser surgery to stop blood vessel leakage
- Injections into the eye to reduce fluid
- Freezing part of the eye to shrink abnormal blood vessels
- Surgery to replace the abnormal fluid and tissue with a clear solution, if bleeding is severe

Control your blood sugar and blood pressure levels, and be sure to get regular annual comprehensive eye exams. Vision that is lost through diabetic retinopathy cannot be restored, but early diagnosis and aggressive treatment can save your vision. With timely treatment and follow-up care, the risk of blindness can drop 90%.

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Sources: National Eye Institute, American Optometric Association

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