



Diabetic Retinopathy

Don't have diabetes? Why you should care.

Diabetes is a growing epidemic that carries the risk of glaucoma, cataracts and the most common diabetic eye disease, retinopathy. Untreated diabetes can lead to complete vision loss, many times without warning symptoms. Yet one-quarter of the 25.8 million Americans over age 20 who have diabetes are unaware that they have the disease.

It is the leading cause of new blindness cases among adults aged 20-74. Up to 24,000 Americans are blinded by diabetic retinopathy each year. The American Optometric Association predicts that by 2050, the number of Americans over 40 years old with diabetic retinopathy will triple to 16 million.

HOW DIABETES AFFECTS THE EYES

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that allows the body to use blood sugar for energy. It is characterized by high levels of blood sugar, which can cause changes in the blood vessels of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye that is necessary for good vision.

In the early stages of diabetic retinopathy, small blood vessels in the eye swell. As the disease progresses, some vessels that nourish the retina become blocked. Abnormal new blood vessels may begin to grow on the surface of the retina to replace the blocked vessels. The new vessels, however, have thin, fragile walls. If they leak blood, severe vision loss and even blindness can result.

EYE EXAMS ARE ESSENTIAL

Diabetic retinopathy can begin without any warning symptoms, which makes a yearly comprehensive eye exam even more critical for diabetics. The only way that diabetic retinopathy can be diagnosed is through a comprehensive eye exam. Diabetics are sometimes first diagnosed

in an optometrist's office when diabetic retinopathy is discovered.

All people with diabetes, including those with Type I (juvenile onset) and Type II (adult onset), are at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy. The longer you have diabetes, the more likely you are to develop it. There is also an increased risk if you have a family history of this disease.

PROTECT YOURSELF

In order to prevent vision loss, early diagnosis and aggressive treatment of diabetic retinopathy are essential. The risk of blindness can be reduced by 90% with timely treatment and follow-up care. Vision that has already been lost, however, cannot be restored.

Prevention is the key to saving sight that might be lost due to late diagnosis. Protect yourself against Type I and Type II diabetes by maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly and eating a low-fat diet. It is also important to have your blood glucose level tested regularly.

TAKE CONTROL

If you have diabetes, you can avoid eye problems by controlling your blood sugar and blood pressure levels and by obtaining regular comprehensive eye exams. No one likes to consider the possibility of becoming blind from eye disease.

At Davis Vision we believe that when you are proactive about your health, you can protect yourself. All you need is the knowledge that regular, comprehensive eye and physical examinations provide, and the willingness to follow your health care providers' recommendations.

For more information, call **1.888.550.BLUE (2583)** or TTY **1.800.523.2847**

or visit us at **www.fepblue.org** (click on the link to FEP BlueVision).

To enroll, visit **www.benefeds.com**.

Make an appointment with your eye care provider if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Blurry vision
- Difficulty reading
- Sudden loss of vision in one eye
- Seeing rings around lights
- Seeing dark spots or flashing lights

Sources: American Optometric Association, American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Diabetes Association, U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Prevent Blindness America, National Eye Institute

