

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Diabetic retinopathy is a condition occurring in persons with diabetes, which causes progressive damage to the retina, the light sensitive lining at the back of the eye. It is a serious sight-threatening complication of diabetes.

Diabetes is a disease that interferes with the body's ability to use and store sugar, which can cause many health problems. Too much sugar in the blood can cause damage throughout the body, including the eyes. Over time, diabetes affects the circulatory system of the retina.

Diabetic retinopathy is the result of damage to the tiny blood vessels that nourish the retina. They leak blood and other fluids that cause swelling of retinal tissue and clouding of vision. The condition usually affects both eyes. The longer a person has diabetes, the more likely they will develop diabetic retinopathy. If left untreated, diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness.

Symptoms of diabetic retinopathy include:

- Spots or floaters in your field of vision
- Blurred vision
- Dark or empty spot in the center of your vision
- Difficulty seeing well at night

In patients with diabetes, prolonged periods of high blood sugar can lead to the accumulation of fluid in the lens inside the eye that controls eye focusing. This changes the curvature of the lens and results in the development of symptoms of blurred vision. The blurring of distance vision as a result of lens swelling will subside once the blood sugar levels are brought under control. Better control of blood sugar levels in patients with diabetes also slows the onset and progression of diabetic retinopathy.

Often there are no visual symptoms in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. It is recommended that everyone with diabetes have a comprehensive dilated eye examination once a year. Early detection and treatment can limit the potential for significant vision loss from diabetic retinopathy.

Treatment of diabetic retinopathy varies depending on the extent of the disease. It may require laser surgery to seal leaking blood vessels or to discourage new leaky blood vessels from forming. Injections of medications into the eye may be needed to decrease inflammation or stop the formation of new blood vessels. In more advanced cases, a surgical procedure to remove and replace the gel-like fluid in the back of the eye, called the vitreous, may be needed. A retinal detachment, defined as a separation of the light-receiving lining in the back of the eye, resulting from diabetic retinopathy, may also require surgical repair.

If you are a diabetic, you can help prevent or slow the development of diabetic retinopathy by taking your prescribed medication, sticking to your diet, exercising regularly, controlling high blood pressure and avoiding alcohol and smoking.