

SAVE YOUR SIGHT

Diabetic Retinopathy ... Will It Cause You to Lose Your Sight?

SIDEBAR

In recent decades, intensive scientific studies by the medical profession have greatly decreased the dangers of eye diseases brought on by diabetes. But vision impairment and vision loss still exist and may be caused by diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in American adults. Although it cannot be completely cured, your doctor can treat it, bring it under control, and preserve vision.

END SIDEBAR

What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes (high blood sugar levels seem to be the main cause of this disease). It is a disease that affects the blood vessels in the retina (the back part of the eye that is sensitive to light). The retina's blood vessels become swollen, can leak fluid, break, or grow abnormally. Vision eventually becomes distorted, and in some cases, severe vision loss or blindness may occur. Just as you can't "feel" cancer in the early stages, you can't "feel" diabetic retinopathy in the early stages. There is no pain associated with it, and vision changes may not be noticed until the disease has progressed to an advanced stage.

Diabetic Retinopathy can appear within the first two years after the onset of diabetes, or it may not show up for 15 or more years. It cannot be totally prevented, but risk can be greatly reduced through early detection and treatment.

Early detection – Annual eye exams through dilated pupils enable eye care specialists to detect diabetic retinopathy before any visual symptoms appear. Early detection improves the potential for saving your sight, and perhaps even your life if you aren't aware that you have diabetes and aren't receiving treatment to control it.

Treatment – The best treatment for diabetic retinopathy is prevention. Studies conducted by the Diabetes Control and Complication Trial show that keeping blood sugar levels in diabetes as close as possible to normal slows the onset and progression of the disease.

Treatment is available to help prevent vision loss. Studies show that laser surgery has reduced the risk of severe vision loss by 90 percent. During laser surgery, a strong beam of light is aimed at the retina to shrink leaking blood vessels, abnormal blood vessels, and reduce macular edema (swelling caused in the macula), from leaking fluid. (The macula is the part of the retina that provides sharp, central vision.)

Laser surgery usually cannot restore vision loss caused by diabetic retinopathy. That's why early detection and treatment are so vital to saving your sight.

The best way to safeguard your vision is to:

- 1) Have your eyes checked each year before you have any onset of disease symptoms.
- 2) If it is found you have diabetic retinopathy, follow your doctor's advice for treatment and care.