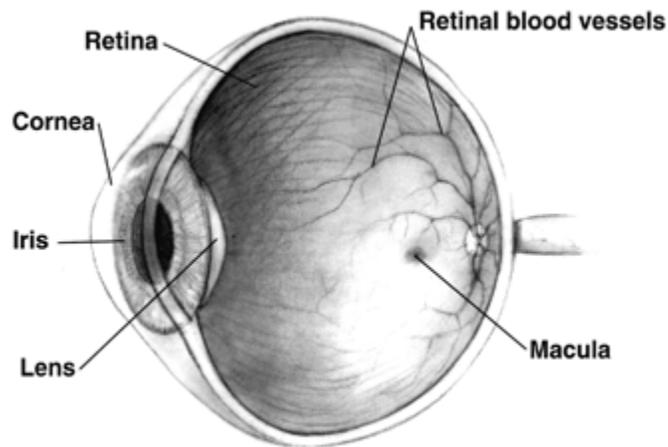


DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

WHAT IS DIABETIC RETINOPATHY?

The most common eye problem from diabetes is called **diabetic retinopathy**. It occurs as a result of damage to the blood vessels that feed the “retina” of the eye. The retina is like the film of a camera; it records the images focused on it.



Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of new cases of blindness. It is the most serious threat to vision that people with diabetes face. Nearly half of all people with diabetes will eventually develop some degree of diabetic retinopathy, but only a few will lose their vision as a result. It usually occurs in both eyes.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

- Uncontrolled high blood sugar over a period of time can cause damage to the blood vessels that feed the retina of the eye.
- The blood vessels may leak fluid. This can cause the retina to swell and vision to blur.
- The small blood vessels going to the back of the eye can break down or become blocked, stopping the normal blood flow to the retina.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- When the blood supply in the back of the eye is disrupted, partial vision loss or blindness can occur.
- Your retina can be badly damaged before you notice any change in your vision.
- Many people do not have any symptoms until it is too late to treat them. These may include blurred vision, eye pain, gradual vision loss or floaters.



Normal Vision



Vision With Diabetic Retinopathy

WHAT ARE MY RISKS?

Several things influence whether you get diabetic retinopathy. These include:

- Blood sugar control: people who keep their blood sugar levels closer to normal are less likely to have retinopathy.
- How long you have had diabetes: the longer you've had diabetes, the more likely you are to have retinopathy.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Diabetic retinopathy is diagnosed through a dilated visual screening examination.

During the examination, the eye specialist will drop some special “dilating” medication in your eyes. This medication will allow your eyes to be examined thoroughly.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

- There is no treatment available that can restore vision already lost.
- Some cases of diabetic retinopathy can be treated with laser surgery that aims a strong beam of light onto the retina to shrink or seal leaking or abnormal vessels.

HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

There are several things you can do to prevent this and other eye problems:

- First and most important, keep your blood sugar levels under tight control.
- Bring high blood pressure under control. High blood pressure makes eye problems worse.
- Quit smoking.
- See your eye specialist regularly for a dilated eye exam. Only an ophthalmologist can detect the signs of retinopathy. Only an ophthalmologist can treat retinopathy.



REFERENCES / LINKS:

American Diabetic Association

<http://www.diabetes.org/>

National Eye Institute: Low Vision Quiz

http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/lowvision/lowvision_quiz.htm

Prevent Blindness America

http://www.preventblindness.org/eye_problems/doc_checklist.html

US Food and Drug Administration: FDA Consumer Magazine

http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2002/202_eyes.html

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



When you call to make an appointment:

- Be prepared to describe any vision problems you are having.
- Ask if you will be able to drive yourself home.

Before you go in for your examination

Make a list of the following:

- Signs or symptoms of eye problems that you have noticed (flashes of light, difficulty seeing at night, temporary double vision, loss of vision, for example)
- Eye injuries or eye surgery you have had (approximate dates and where you were treated)
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking
- Questions about your vision.
- Your general health condition (allergies, chronic health problems, operations)
- Family history of eye problems (glaucoma, cataracts, etc.)

Take along the following:

- Your glasses, contact lenses, or both
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking

During the examination:

- Ask questions about anything that seems unclear to you, such as the names and purposes of tests you may undergo
- Ask if there are any changes since your last exam

- Asks when it is best to call the doctor with questions
- Find out when you should return for your next exam

General Questions To Ask About Your Vision:

- What changes can I expect in my vision?
- Will my vision loss get worse?
- Will regular eyeglasses improve my vision?
- What medical/surgical treatments are available for my condition?
- What can I do to protect or prolong my vision?
- Will diet, exercise or other lifestyle changes help?
- If my vision can't be corrected, can you refer me to a specialist in low vision?
- Where can I get vision rehabilitation?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities like reading, sewing, cooking, or fixing things around the house?
- What training and services are available to help me live better and more safely with vision problems?

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



Endorsed by: VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention