

Other Diabetic Eye Problems

People with diabetes are also at risk for other diabetic eye diseases, such as:

- cataract - clouding of the eye's lens.

People with diabetes are twice as likely to develop a cataract. Cataracts can often be treated with surgery.

- glaucoma - increase in fluid pressure inside the eye that leads to optic nerve damage and loss of vision.

People with diabetes are also twice as likely as other adults to develop glaucoma. Glaucoma can often be treated with medications, or laser or other forms of surgery.

Diabetic Retinopathy and Other Eye Problems

What eye problems are often associated with diabetes?

Diabetic eye disease refers to a group of eye problems that may occur in persons with diabetes as a complication. All can cause severe vision loss or even blindness. Diabetic eye disease can often be treated before vision loss occurs. All people with diabetes should have a dilated eye examination at least once a year.

Diabetic eye diseases include the following:

diabetic retinopathy
cataract
glaucoma

Diabetic retinopathy is the most common eye disease in persons with diabetes.

What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness in American adults. It is caused by changes in the blood vessels of the retina. In some people with diabetic retinopathy, retinal blood vessels may swell and leak fluid, while in others, abnormal new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina. These changes may result in vision loss or blindness.

Diabetic retinopathy cannot be completely avoided, but the risk can be greatly reduced. Better control of blood sugar level slows the onset and progression of retinopathy and reduces the need for laser surgery for severe retinopathy.

What are the symptoms of diabetic retinopathy?

A person with an early stage of diabetic retinopathy may be asymptomatic and without pain. Vision may not change until the disease progresses.

A condition called macular edema may occur when the macula, a part of the retina, swells from the leaking fluid and causes blurred vision. When new vessels grow on the surface of the retina, they can bleed into the eye, blocking vision.

Who is at risk for diabetic retinopathy?

Anyone with diabetes is at risk for diabetic retinopathy. The longer a person has diabetes, the more likely it becomes that he/she will develop diabetic retinopathy.

Can diabetic retinopathy be prevented?

Although diabetic retinopathy cannot be prevented, the risk of developing it can be reduced by:

having a dilated eye examination once a year.

strictly managing diabetes by:

taking medications as directed.

using insulin as directed.

eating appropriate foods to manage blood sugar levels.

exercising to lower and help the body use blood sugar.

testing blood sugar levels regularly.

testing urine for ketone levels regularly.

Treatment for diabetic retinopathy:

Specific treatment for diabetic retinopathy will be determined by your physician based on:

your age, overall health, and medical history

extent of the disease

your tolerance for specific medications, procedures, or therapies

expectations for the course of the disease

your opinion or preference

Diabetic retinopathy is often treated with laser surgery to shrink the abnormal blood vessels or to seal the leaking ones.