

# Diabetic Retinopathy

## What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye problem caused by diabetes mellitus. It affects the retina, which is light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

Retinopathy occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels in the retina. This damage can lead to problems with your vision, including blindness. However, you may be able to prevent severe vision problems if:

- You keep your diabetes and blood pressure under control.
- You have regular eye exams.
- You get early treatment for retinopathy.

## How does it occur?

High blood sugar levels damage small blood vessels. The weakened blood vessels may break and leak fluid and blood. Also, new abnormal blood vessels may grow. These new blood vessels can bleed, cause cloudy vision, and destroy the retina.

The longer you have had diabetes, the more likely you are to have retinopathy.

## What are the symptoms?

Diabetic retinopathy begins before one has any symptom. As the problem worsens, you may get:

- blurred vision
- floaters, which are black spots or cobweblike shapes
- temporary or permanent blindness.

## How is it diagnosed?

We will look at your eyes with a special light. We will be able to see inside your eyes and look for signs of retinopathy.

## How is it treated?

Early treatment before the retina has been badly damaged is the most successful in reducing vision loss from this disease.

We may use a laser to seal leaking blood vessels. We may also use a laser to destroy abnormal blood vessels.

If you have had bleeding into the clear gel (vitreous) that fills the inside of the eye, we may remove the gel. The gel will be replaced with a clear fluid. This procedure is called a vitrectomy.

## How long will the effects last?

As long as you have diabetes, there is a chance you will have retinopathy. However, careful control of your blood sugar levels will help delay and possibly prevent vision loss.

You may need to be treated more than once for retinopathy. Have your eyes checked regularly to make sure you get treatment when you need it.

Retinopathy can cause the retina to become detached. This means the retina is pulled away from the back of the eye. If this happens, you must see us for urgent treatment to reduce the chance of permanent vision loss. Call us if you start seeing dark spots, floaters, or light flashes or your vision is blocked, blurred, or distorted.

## How can I take care of myself?

Follow our recommendations and these guidelines:

- Make sure you have eye exams regularly. Ask us how often your eyes should be checked.
- Immediately tell us if you have any change in your vision.

## What can be done to help prevent diabetic retinopathy?

To help prevent diabetic retinopathy, follow these guidelines:

- Control your blood sugar.
- Control your blood pressure.
- Stop smoking. (Smoking may speed up the development of retinopathy.)
- Follow your diet and health care plan for your diabetes so you have fewer complications.