



Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is a condition in which the blood vessels of the retina become damaged by excess sugar in the blood stream. When nourishment to the light sensitive cells of the retina are blocked, vision loss can occur. In fact, **diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in people with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes.**

Risk Factors

Diabetic retinopathy can occur in anyone who has diabetes. The longer you have had diabetes, the larger your risk for this condition, particularly if you do not carefully control your blood sugar levels. Additional risk factors may include:

Tobacco use

Pregnancy

High blood pressure

High cholesterol

Risk Management and Detection

You need to have a yearly dilated eye exam. This exam can help detect early stages of diabetic retinopathy, helping ensure prompt treatment when necessary to prevent a permanent loss of vision. It is important to detect diabetic macular edema (DME) which is a condition that often occurs in conjunction with diabetic retinopathy and can result in distorted vision, vision loss and blindness.

SYMPTOMS OF DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 28 percent of diabetics have or will develop diabetic retinopathy, but many fail to have yearly eye examinations due to a lack of clear symptoms. **Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of diabetes-related vision loss in people ages 24-70 in the United States**, but noticeable symptoms may not manifest until irreversible vision complications have already occurred.

It is important to know the symptoms of diabetic retinopathy, but equally important that you visit a qualified Board Certified Ophthalmologist annually for early detection of this condition. Even when asymptomatic, diabetic retinopathy treatment can be used to help guard against vision loss.

Diabetic Retinopathy Symptoms

Symptoms of diabetic retinopathy may include:

- Double vision
- Eye pain, pressure, or redness
- Vision fluctuation
- Flashers, floaters, and spots
- Blind spots in the central field of vision
- Blurry vision
- Corneal abrasions
- Nearsightedness not related to presbyopia
- Cataracts

In addition, ***diabetic retinopathy may lead to complications*** such as:

Vitreous hemorrhage - When new, abnormal blood vessels grow, they may bleed into the vitreous. Symptoms of this condition may include dark spots and floaters

Retinal detachment - When abnormal blood vessels stimulate the growth of scar tissue the retina may be pulled away from the back of the eye. Symptoms of this condition may include spots, floaters, flashers, and complete vision loss

Glaucoma – New blood vessels growing in the front part of your eye may interfere with the normal flow of fluid, building pressure and damaging the optic nerve. Symptoms of glaucoma may include eye pain, colored rings around lights, and a sudden onset of vision disturbances

The symptoms of diabetic retinopathy and those of its complications are often very similar. The best way to prevent these symptoms from occurring is through the early detection and prompt treatment of diabetic retinopathy.

For more information about the detection and treatment of diabetic retinopathy, please call 619-425-7755 or 760-352-7755, or contact California Retina Associates online to schedule an appointment at our San Diego or El Centro, California location.

Treat Options for Diabetic Retinopathy

Laser Treatments

Focal laser photocoagulation – Aiming laser energy directly at the affected area or applying it in a grid-like pattern, our eye doctors can target and seal specific blood vessels, remove damaged eye tissue, and clear away scars that can lead to vision loss

Scatter laser photocoagulation – Applying tiny spots of laser energy to the periphery of the retina, our eye doctors can treat surrounding tissue without touching the retina itself. This is more effective for treating early stages of diabetic retinopathy

Vitrectomy

For people with advanced or proliferative diabetic retinopathy, bleeding into the vitreous may render laser treatments ineffective. In some cases, this condition will clear on its own. However, when it fails to do so, a vitrectomy will be necessary to prevent further vision loss.

A vitrectomy is a procedure in which the vitreous humor is removed. The vitreous humor is then replaced with a saline liquid to restore pressure in the inner chamber of the eye. Vitrectomy is more invasive than laser treatment, but may be necessary for advanced stages of diabetic retinopathy. To help reduce your risk for this type of treatment, we recommend people with diabetes visit our office at least once a year even if you are not currently experiencing any symptoms of diabetic retinopathy.

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