



## VISION PROBLEMS CAUSED BY DIABETES



### Vision Problems Caused by Diabetes

People with diabetes have a higher risk of blindness than people without diabetes. In the United States, diabetes is responsible for 8 percent of legal blindness, making it the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age. Each year, from 12,000 to 24,000 people lose their sight because of diabetes. However, most people with diabetes do not experience such debilitating vision loss.

The key to successful eye care is to monitor your disease and your eyes. The American Optometric Association recommends those with diabetes have a dilated eye examination at least once a year. More frequent exams may be needed if you have eye disease or if you notice a change in your vision. In addition, if you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant, you should have a dilated eye examination.

These are various eye problems that can result from diabetes:

#### Vision Changes

Many times, blurring or changes in vision can be the first symptoms of diabetes. These changes can be temporary and should be reported to your doctor.

#### Glaucoma

People with diabetes are 40 percent more likely to experience glaucoma than people without diabetes. The longer someone has had diabetes, the more common glaucoma is. Risk for glaucoma also increases with age.

#### Cataracts

Many people without diabetes get cataracts, but in people with diabetes this eye condition is 60 percent more likely to develop. People with diabetes also tend to get cataracts at a younger age and with faster progression.

#### Retinopathy

The longer you've had diabetes, the more likely you are to have diabetic retinopathy (a general term for all disorders of the retina caused by diabetes). Risk factors include blood sugar control, blood pressure levels, how long you have had diabetes and family history.

There are two types of retinopathy:

**Nonproliferative retinopathy** usually has no effect on vision and needs no treatment. However, after having this diagnosed, you need an annual dilated eye exam to monitor the eye disease to make sure it is not getting worse. Although nonproliferative retinopathy does not usually cause any vision loss, abnormalities may interfere with vision if it involves the macula, the area on the retina that provides the sharpest vision.

**Proliferative retinopathy** is a serious progression of nonproliferative retinopathy. In this form, blood vessels branch out or proliferate in and around the retina. It can cause bleeding into the fluid-filled center of the eye or swelling of the retina and lead to blindness.

Your retina can be badly damaged before you notice any change in vision. The sooner retinopathy is diagnosed, the greater the likelihood that treatment will be successful.