

Diabetic Retinopathy

What is Diabetic Retinopathy? When long-term diabetes causes progressive damage to the eye's retina, this condition is referred to as Diabetic Retinopathy. There are two stages of Diabetic Retinopathy: Nonproliferative (NPDR) and Proliferative (PDR). NPDR is an early stage of Diabetic Retinopathy in which blood or fluid begins to leak from the blood vessels of the retina and causes swelling or the formation of deposits. PDR occurs when abnormal new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina or the optic nerve. Diabetic Retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in working-age Americans.

What Causes Diabetic Retinopathy? The disease occurs when high blood-sugar levels cause damage to the blood vessels of the retina. NPDR can lead to vision problems if existing blood vessels leak fluid into the retina. PDR can lead to visual disruption if abnormal new blood vessels hemorrhage and leak fluid.



What are the Symptoms of Diabetic Retinopathy?

- There Often are No Symptoms at First
- Decreased Visual Acuity
- Seeing Floating Spots (Floaters)
- Vision Change in Only One Eye
- Vision Changes Lasting More than a Few Days
- Vision Changes Not Associated with a Change in Blood Sugar

How is Diabetic Retinopathy Detected? Everyone with diabetes should be screened regularly by an ophthalmologist. Retinal photography can be used to find out if treatment is needed.

Who is Most at Risk? People with both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are at risk. Those who have had diabetes for a long time and those whose diabetes is poorly controlled are more likely to develop Diabetic Retinopathy. Most people who have been diabetic for more than 30 years show at least some signs of DR.

How is Diabetic Retinopathy Treated? Treatment of diabetes is also considered treatment for Diabetic Retinopathy. Laser surgery can be used to seal leaking blood vessels in the retina. A vitrectomy (a surgical treatment) can be used to treat advanced PDR by replacing the blood-filled vitreous with a clear solution.

How can Diabetic Retinopathy Be Prevented? Strict control of blood sugar levels significantly reduces a person's chance of vision loss due to Diabetic Retinopathy. Controlling high blood pressure and kidney problems will also decrease your risk. People with diabetes should see an ophthalmologist for an eye exam every year to catch problems early.

This document is provided for informational purposes only. Please consult an eye care professional about symptoms that may require medical attention and may or may not be covered by your medical plan and/or routine vision plan.