

Diabetes is a condition that, over time, can weaken and cause changes in the small blood vessels that nourish the eye's light sensitive retina. Called **diabetic retinopathy**, these changes seriously affect vision and if left untreated, can cause blindness. Early diagnosis and treatment is essential. That's one reason why it is important to have your eyes examined periodically by a doctor of optometry, especially if you are a diabetic or have a family history of diabetes.

Detection of diabetic retinopathy

Your doctor will use an instrument called an ophthalmoscope which lights and magnifies the blood vessels in your eyes. Interior of eye may be photographed for more information.

Beginning stages of diabetic retinopathy

Blurriness in central or peripheral (side) vision may have no visual symptoms at all. It depends on where the blood vessel changes are taking place in the retina.

Progression of diabetic retinopathy

May notice a cloudiness in vision, blind spots, or floaters caused new vessels which blocks light from reaching the retina.

Advanced stages of diabetic retinopathy

Connective scar tissue forms in association with new blood vessel growth causing additional distortion and blurriness. Over time, this tissue can shrink and detach the retina by pulling it toward the center of the eye.

Treatment of diabetic retinopathy

After diagnosing retinopathy, laser and other surgical treatments can be used to reduce the progression of this eye disease and decrease the risk of vision loss.

Your optometrist will explain the types of treatment available and those best suited for you. Low vision aids such as telescopic lenses for distance vision, microscopic lenses, magnifying glasses and electronic magnifiers for close work may be prescribed by your optometrist.

What can you do?

Not every diabetic patient develops retinopathy, but chances of getting it do increase after having diabetes for several years. Evidence also suggests that such factors as pregnancy, high blood pressure and smoking may cause diabetic eye disease to develop or worsen.

It is important that you take steps to help prevent the development of diabetic retinopathy, including:

- Take your prescribed medication as instructed**
- Follow a proper diet**
- Exercise regularly**
- Have your eyes examined regularly**

By doing so, chances are good that you can enjoy a life time of good vision and health.



Blurred central or side vision (above) or a blind spot in central vision (below) may indicate diabetic retinopathy

