

# Importance of Eye Exams for People with Diabetes

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye disease caused by complications of diabetes. It occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye.

Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness in American adults and is the most common diabetic disease. An estimated 40 to 45% of diabetic Americans experience some stage of diabetic retinopathy.<sup>1</sup>

Below are some facts about Diabetic Retinopathy:

- **No Warning Signs** - 50% of patients are not getting their eyes examined or are diagnosed too late for treatment to be effective.<sup>2</sup> Patients normally don't experience symptoms until their vision is already damaged.
- **Who's at risk** - Individuals with Type 1 & Type 2 diabetes are most at risk especially if their diabetes is poorly controlled. Others include people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol and blood sugar, Hispanics, African Americans and pregnant mothers.
- **Vision loss and blindness** - Diabetic retinopathy usually affects both of your eyes by damaging your retina- the light sensitive tissue at the back of your eye. Over time, the blood vessels protecting your retina become blocked causing vision blurriness or loss. If left untreated, it could ultimately lead to blindness.
- **Annual comprehensive eye exams are crucial** - A dilated eye exam allows for an eye care professional to notice the early warning signs for this disease and prevent vision loss. Timely treatment and appropriate follow-up care can reduce the risk of blindness by 95%.<sup>1</sup>
- **Treatment options vary** - Your eye care professional can advise you on treatment options to either stop or slow down the disease. Often laser surgery is performed to treat the damaged blood vessels around the retina.
- **Serious Vision Threatening Disease** - An estimated 4.1 million and 899,000 Americans are affected by retinopathy and vision-threatening retinopathy, respectively.<sup>2</sup>



## Did you know...?

- Diabetes Retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness among working-aged adults in the US ages 20 to 74.<sup>1</sup>
- The longer a person has diabetes, the more likely they are to develop diabetic retinopathy, especially if their diabetes is poorly controlled.

This most extensive complication of diabetes has no symptoms, yet can lead to vision loss and eventual blindness. Retinopathy attacks the blood vessels surrounding the retina causing extensive damage to your vision. A healthy retina is needed to ensure good eyesight; therefore it is important to talk to your doctor about diabetes self care and scheduling a comprehensive eye exam.

**Schedule your yearly eye exam today**

<sup>1</sup> National Eye Institute, April 2009

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006

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