

# DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

## Who is at risk for having Diabetic Retinopathy ?

Anyone who suffers with diabetes is at risk for Diabetic Retinopathy. Luckily, most Diabetic Retinopathy is the Background Diabetic Retinopathy form. This type rarely causes vision loss, and usually does not require extensive treatment. However, the chance of having Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy increases the longer you have diabetes.

## What is the treatment for Diabetic Retinopathy ?

The treatment for Diabetic Retinopathy is twofold. First, you must control your diabetes as well as possible through proper medication, exercise, and diet. Unfortunately, even with proper control of diabetes, healthy eyes are not guaranteed.

Therefore, the second step in treatment is to have regular eye examinations, which are necessary to monitor your retina for early signs of Diabetic Retinopathy. Most vision loss associated with Diabetic Retinopathy can be prevented with early detection and treatment.

The actual treatment for Diabetic Retinopathy is usually accomplished with painless laser surgery. Lasers can be used to seal off leaking blood vessels, thereby stopping the bleeding and leakage of fluid. Also, laser surgery can be used to repair or help prevent retinal detachments.

However, at this time there is no actual "cure" for Diabetic Retinopathy. The goal of any treatment plan for Diabetic Retinopathy is to stabilize your vision, and to prevent excessive loss of sight.

## What is Diabetic Retinopathy ?

Diabetic Retinopathy is a disease of the eye, caused by the effects of diabetes. Diabetes can weaken the tiny blood vessels in the retina of the eye. The retina is a very delicate tissue, located in the back of the eye. It acts in much the same way as does the film inside of a camera. The retina records the images that enable you to see. In Diabetic Retinopathy, as these blood vessels weaken, the retina will become impaired, and vision loss can occur.

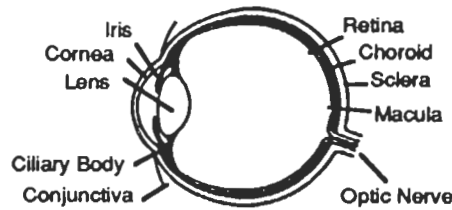
## What are the symptoms of Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic Retinopathy can cause loss of sight. The amount of vision loss will depend upon the severity of the condition. In the early stages of the disease, you may not notice any blurring or reduction in your vision. However, as Diabetic Retinopathy continues, and some damage occurs within the retina, your vision will become mildly to extremely blurred.

## What happens to the retina during Diabetic Retinopathy ?

The blood vessels in the retina become weak, and lose their ability to remain "water-tight" because of the effects of diabetes. These blood vessels will then begin to leak. The fluid will collect in the retina, causing the retina to swell and thicken.

During this period, you may not notice any blurring, or reduction in your vision, as damage to your retina is minimal. This stage of Diabetic Retinopathy is called Background Diabetic Retinopathy.



**The Human Eye**

## What happens if the Diabetic Retinopathy progresses ?

If the Diabetic Retinopathy progresses, the retina will continue to swell. Also, the retinal blood vessels may clog, and the flow of blood in the retina will stop. When this happens, the retina will grow new blood vessels, in what is called neovascularization. However, these new blood vessels are very fragile, and they will bleed, or leak, easily.

As this bleeding and continued swelling occurs in the retina, your vision will become blurry. This advanced stage of Diabetic Retinopathy is called Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy.

In extreme cases of Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy, scar tissue can develop from excessive leakage of the new blood vessels. This scar tissue can pull on the retina, and cause the retina to detach from the back of the eye. This will cause a drastic loss of vision, unless treatment is immediate.

**Most vision loss associated with Diabetic Retinopathy can be prevented with early detection and treatment.**