

# DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

**D** Diabetes is a condition that can interfere with the body's ability to use and store sugar. Diabetes can also, over time, weaken and cause changes in the small blood vessels that nourish the eye's light sensitive retina. When this occurs, it is called diabetic retinopathy. These changes may include leaking of blood, development of brush-like branches of the vessels and enlargement of certain parts of the vessels.

Diabetic retinopathy can seriously affect vision and, if left untreated, cause blindness.

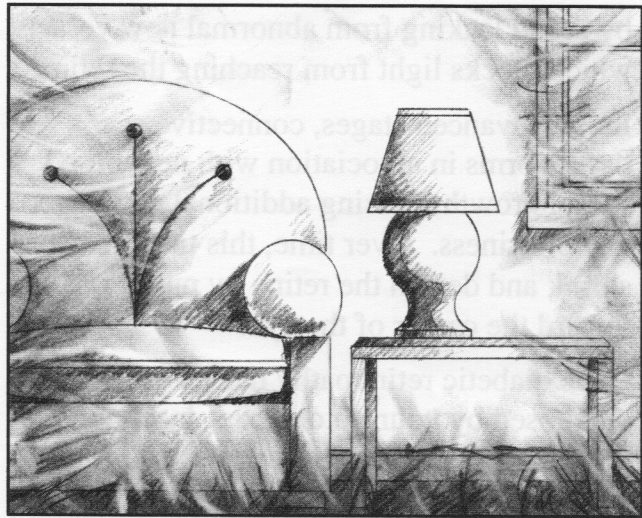
Since this disease can cause blindness, early diagnosis and treatment is essential. That's one reason why it is important to have your eyes examined periodically by a doctor of optometry, especially if you are a diabetic or if you have a family history of diabetes.

During a thorough, comprehensive eye examination, your optometrist gets to know you, your family history, your lifestyle and your vision needs.

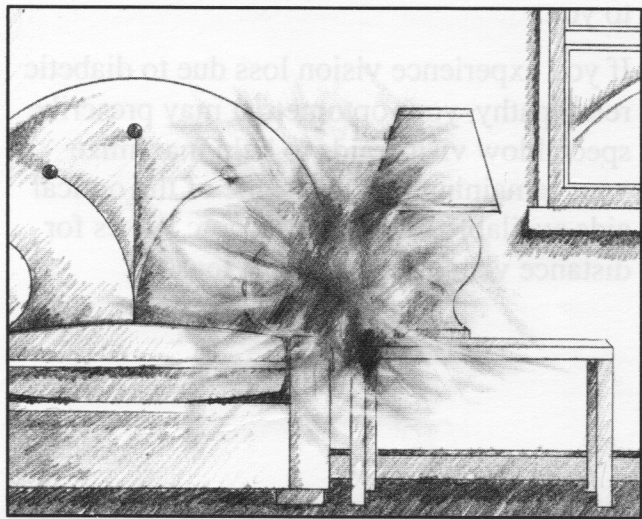
To detect diabetic retinopathy, your doctor can look inside your eyes with an instrument called an ophthalmoscope, which lights and magnifies the blood vessels in your eyes.

The interior of your eyes may also be photographed to provide more information.

The beginning stages of diabetic retinopathy may cause blurriness in your central or peripheral (side) vision, or it may produce no visual symptoms at all. It mainly depends on



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



where the blood vessel changes are taking place in your eye's retina (the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye where images are focused). As diabetic retinopathy progresses, you may notice a cloudiness in your vision, blind spots or floaters. This is usually caused

*(over, please)*

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by blood leaking from abnormal new vessels which blocks light from reaching the retina.

In the advanced stages, 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.

Once diabetic retinopathy has been diagnosed by your optometrist, laser and other surgical treatments can be used to reduce the progression of this eye disease and decrease the risk of vision loss. Ask your optometrist to explain the types of treatment available and those best suited to you.

If you experience vision loss due to diabetic retinopathy, your optometrist may prescribe special low vision aids to help maximize your remaining vision. Some of the optical aids available include telescopic lenses for distance vision, microscopic lenses,

magnifying glasses and electronic magnifiers for close work.

Not every diabetic patient develops retinopathy, but the 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.

As a diabetic, or a person at risk, 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 lifetime of good vision and health.

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