



Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is one of the most frequent causes of blindness in this country. However, this form of blindness is completely preventable with proper control of the diabetes, and with yearly eye examination through dilated pupils.

Diabetes causes a problem with the blood vessels in the body. The blood vessels begin to leak fluid, blood, and protein. In the eye, this leakage is seen in the retina as retinal bleeding and swelling. This blood and swelling interferes with the normal function of the eye, resulting in decreased vision. If this condition is not corrected, visual loss can be permanent. This type of retinopathy is called non-proliferative background diabetic retinopathy.

In some, the abnormal blood vessels begin to grow in the retina. These abnormally growing blood vessels are very fragile, and especially prone to bleeding. They may cause a large sudden bleed, called a vitreous hemorrhage, resulting in rapid loss of vision. Usually, this visual loss is not permanent, but vision may not return to normal after this hemorrhage. This type of retinopathy is called proliferative diabetic retinopathy and requires prompt treatment.

The best treatment for diabetic retinopathy is PREVENTION. All diabetics should check their own blood sugar daily, visit their medical doctor routinely, follow a diabetic diet and have a dilated eye exam at least yearly.

If prevention of diabetic retinopathy has failed, your ophthalmologist can direct your treatment to stabilize leaky blood vessels or close abnormal blood vessels to preserve and sometimes improve vision. However, these problems will continue to recur as long as the diabetes is not medically controlled.