



If You Have Diabetes, Get a Comprehensive Dilated Eye Exam

People with diabetes should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year to check for early signs of diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of visual impairment. Timely treatment and appropriate followup care can reduce the risk of blindness by 90 percent, even for people with advanced diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. A healthy retina is necessary for good vision. In a comprehensive dilated eye exam, the eye care professional gets a better look at the retina by using eye drops to dilate (widen) the pupil.

Diabetic retinopathy often has no early warning signs. People with diabetes shouldn't wait for symptoms.

Between 40 and 45 percent of all Americans diagnosed with diabetes have some stage of diabetic retinopathy.

Early detection leads to early treatment, which is important in reducing vision loss from this disease. With timely treatment and appropriate followup care, people with advanced diabetic retinopathy can reduce their risk of blindness by 90 percent.

Diabetic retinopathy is most often treated with laser surgery, which seals leaking blood vessels or destroys abnormal ones. Controlling elevated blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels may help slow the onset and progression of the disease and reduce the risk of vision loss.

For more information about diabetic retinopathy, visit the Healthy Vision 2010 Website at www.healthyvision2010.org, sponsored by the National Eye Institute (NEI) and the Healthy Vision Consortium.

The NEI conducts and supports research that leads to sight-saving treatment and plays a key role in reducing visual impairment and blindness. The NEI is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.