

Diabetic retinopathy



What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy (a form of diabetic eye disease) is a complication of diabetes that affects the small blood vessels of the retina. It remains one of the leading causes of vision loss, despite availability of effective treatment if the disease is detected in the early stages.

What are the symptoms of diabetic retinopathy?

- There are often no vision symptoms in the early stages. Changes in sight or loss of vision do not occur until the disease is already advanced.
- As the disease progresses, new leaky blood vessels grow in the retina causing the appearance of 'clouds' moving across the vision which can obstruct a person's sight.
- If the blood vessels around the centre of the retina are involved, the ability to see fine detail during everyday activities is affected.

Who is at risk of diabetic retinopathy?

- It is estimated that 2.8 per cent of the population aged over 55 years have diabetic retinopathy.
- Twenty two per cent of people with known Type 2 diabetes have some form of retinopathy related to their diabetes.

- Within 15 years of being diagnosed with diabetes, almost three out of four diabetics will have diabetic retinopathy.
- People who have had diabetes for many years, have diabetic kidney disease or have Type 1 diabetes have a greater risk of developing diabetic retinopathy.
- Diabetic retinopathy is one of the primary vision threatening conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

What is the best defence against diabetic retinopathy?

- Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent up to 98 per cent of severe vision loss.
- An eye test at least every two years (or as directed by an eye care professional) for people with diabetes is the best way to prevent vision loss.
- Regular eye examinations with dilated pupils are vital for the detection of diabetic retinopathy and can ensure timely treatment.
- In addition to regular eye tests, important factors to reduce the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy include good management of blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Where to go for more information

All people diagnosed with diabetes should have regular eye examinations. Arrange an appropriate referral to an eye care professional.

For more information visit www.diabetesaustralia.com.au or contact Diabetes Australia on 1300 136 588.

For more information on eye health visit www.visioninitiative.org.au