

Diabetic Retinopathy

One less obvious health impact of diabetes is the effect the disease has on your eyes. Diabetic retinopathy is a complication that those with type 1 or type 2 diabetes need to be concerned with while managing their disease. Diabetic retinopathy is a complication caused by damage to the blood vessels in the light-sensitive tissue in the back of the eye called the retina.

The eye surgeons at Penn Highlands Ophthalmology treat thousands of diabetic retinopathy patients each year and are highly skilled at monitoring the progression and the laser procedures used to combat the affects of the disease. Surgeries and other procedures are performed at Penn Highlands Clearfield, Penn Highlands DuBois and at Clarion Hospital.

HOW DIABETIC RETINOPATHY DAMAGES VISION

Proper blood flow to the retina is very important to normal sight. Too much blood sugar can damage the tiny blood vessels that provide this blood to the retina, causing damage to these vessels. As the body tries to grow new blood vessels to the retina, the new vessels do not develop properly and leakage and a reduction in proper blood flow occurs. This decreased blood flow decreases the light sensitivity and reduces a person's vision.

TWO TYPES OF DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

There are two types of diabetic retinopathy. Early diabetic retinopathy, often called nonproliferative diabetic retinopathy (NPDR) occurs when the needed new blood vessels do not

form at all. Patients with this type of disease are considered to have mild to severe disease that progresses as the blood vessels become more blocked or damaged. When this occurs, nerve fibers throughout the retina and, in particular, the central part of the retina, called the macula, begins to swell. This more severe form requires medical treatment.

Advanced diabetic retinopathy, often called proliferative diabetic retinopathy, occurs when the blood vessels are damaged and new vessels begin to grow. The abnormal vessels growing in the eye can cause scar tissue and may leak into the vitreous, or fluid that fills the center of the eye. When too much scar tissue builds up, the retina becomes detached from the eye. The leaking blood also may cause too much pressure to build up inside the eye, causing damage to the nerve that carries images from your eye to your brain. The result of this pressure and nerve damage is glaucoma.

SYMPTOMS OF DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

In the beginning stages of diabetic retinopathy, vision is normal and there may not be any symptoms. However, as the disease progresses, a person may experience spots or lines floating in their vision. Symptoms that become apparent as the disease progresses include:



- Blurred vision
- Vision that changes from good to bad and back
- Difficulty identifying colors
- Areas of vision that appear dark
- Vision loss

MANAGEMENT OF YOUR DIABETES

Visiting your physician and managing your diabetes is the best way to prevent loss of vision due to diabetic retinopathy. Yearly dilation exams with your ophthalmologist, even if your vision seems fine, are recommended. Pregnancy often leads to a sudden onset of diabetes. Contact your eye doctor immediately if you sense a change in vision or have symptoms.

HOW TO TREAT

Those with mild to moderate NPDR may not need treatment. By closely monitoring your eyes, your ophthalmologist can determine when to start treatment for your diabetic retinopathy.

Those with advanced disease may need surgical attention depending on what specifically is occurring with the affected retina. Several types of laser treatments, called photocoagulation, can shrink the blood vessels in the eye and stop or slow the leakage of blood into the center of the eye. These procedures are done in the ophthalmology office.

A surgical procedure that may be recommended is a vitrectomy. This procedure uses a small incision in the eye to allow the surgeon to remove blood and scar tissue that is causing the symptoms. This procedure is done in a surgery center or hospital and uses general anesthesia.

Penn Highlands Ophthalmology has offices in Clarion, Clearfield, DuBois and Philipsburg. For an appointment in the Clarion or DuBois offices, please call 814-371-2390, and for an appointment in the Clearfield or Philipsburg offices, please call 814-768-8888. For more information on the physicians, go to www.phhealthcare.org.

CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO MEET ALL YOUR EYE CARE NEEDS.

PENN HIGHLANDS OPHTHALMOLOGY

A Service of Penn Highlands DuBois

865 Beaver Drive
DuBois, PA 15801

814-371-2390

Medical Arts Building
807 Turnpike Avenue, Suite 150
Clearfield, PA 16830

814-768-8888

Moshannon Valley Community
Medical Building
271 Railroad Street
Philipsburg, PA 16866

814-768-8888

Clarion Health Complex
24 Doctors Lane, Suite 200
Clarion, PA 16214

814-371-2390

For more information please visit us at
www.phhealthcare.org

