



Diabetic Retinopathy Information Sheet

What is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is a common eye problem that can happen in people who have had diabetes for a long time. It is sometimes called “diabetes in the eye.” High blood sugar slowly damages the small blood vessels in the back of the eye, in a part called the retina. Over time, new unhealthy blood vessels may grow, or part of your retina may swell and make your vision worse. Without treatment, this can lead to serious vision problems.

Who Is at Risk?

Anyone with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes can get diabetic retinopathy. Your risk is higher if you:

- Have had diabetes for many years
- Have trouble keeping your blood sugar in a healthy range
- Have high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Are pregnant
- Smoke cigarettes

What Are the Symptoms?

You may not notice any symptoms in the early stages. As the disease gets worse, you may have:

- Blurry or changing vision
- Spots or floaters in your vision
- Dark patches or missing areas in your sight
- Trouble seeing at night

Since vision loss can happen slowly and without pain, it is important to get regular eye exams.

How Is It Diagnosed?

An eye doctor checks for diabetic retinopathy using:

- A complete exam, including dilation to look at the retina at the back of your eye
- A scan to check for swelling at the back of your eye



- Your eye doctor may also take photos or use special imaging to check the blood vessels

Treatment Options

You may not need treatment in the early stages, just good control of your blood sugar and regular eye check-ups. If the condition gets worse, your doctor may recommend:

- **Eye injections** to reduce swelling and stop new unhealthy blood vessels from growing
- **Laser treatments** to stop unhealthy blood vessels from growing
- **Surgery** to remove blood or scar tissue if you have had bleeding inside the eye

Living with Diabetic Retinopathy

- Work with your healthcare team to manage diabetes and other risk factors like blood pressure and cholesterol
- Have yearly eye exams, even if you can see well
- Contact your eye doctor if your vision changes

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Can diabetic retinopathy be reversed?

A: Early changes can sometimes improve with better blood sugar control. Later stages may need treatment to stop the damage from getting worse.

Q: Will I go blind?

A: If it is not treated, it can cause severe vision loss. But with early care, many people keep good vision.

Q: Can I prevent it?

A: Yes, by keeping your diabetes under control, not smoking, and getting a full eye exam every year.

This document was reviewed by Dr. Steve Arshinoff.