

Diabetes-related vision loss increasing



More than 30 million Americans live with diabetes today. Living a healthy life with diabetes is possible, but it is a serious disease that requires proper medical care.

Diabetic retinopathy is a possible complication of diabetes. It is caused by damage in the blood vessels of the eye's retina. It is also a leading cause of vision loss and blindness.

Diabetic retinopathy rates are rapidly increasing, according to the National Eye Institute. From 2000 to 2010, diabetic retinopathy cases increased 89 percent from 4.06 million to 7.69 million. And, that number is expected to nearly double by the year 2050.

Keeping eyes healthy

If you have diabetes, there are ways to lead a healthy life and avoid problems like diabetic retinopathy. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease recommends:

- **Keep blood glucose (blood sugar) levels under control.** High blood glucose damages the blood vessels on the retina over time. The blood vessels may become blocked, cutting off blood supply to the retina. Work with your doctor to set a target blood glucose number. Get clear instruction from your medical team on how you can meet your goal. A healthy diet, regular exercise, and certain diabetes medicines may be needed.
- **Track your blood pressure.** Many people associate blood pressure with heart disease, but it matters for diabetes too. Long-term high blood pressure also harms your retina's blood vessels. Be sure to have your blood pressure checked regularly. Ask your doctor how often it should be checked. If you need blood pressure medicine, take it exactly as your doctor prescribes.

EARLY SIGNS OF EYE PROBLEMS

Diabetic retinopathy may not have any early signs or symptoms. That's why it's important to keep blood sugar and blood pressure under control, even if you feel fine.

If you notice any of the following problems, see your doctor:

- Double vision
- Blurry vision
- Seeing rings, flashes or spots
- Eye pain or a feeling of pressure in the eye
- Trouble seeing out of the corner of your eye

You can take steps to manage diabetes. Talk to your doctor, nutritionist, and medical team about keeping your eyes — and your entire body — as healthy as possible.