

Did You Know Diabetes Can Harm Vision?



Vision loss can be frightening, but there are good treatments available. Nashoba Valley Medical Center's Eye Care Institute is the only hospital in the region able to offer patients certain highly advanced ophthalmic surgeries, including a surgical procedure called a vitrectomy to treat retinopathy.

"We recently acquired a cutting-edge microscope and top-of-the-line vitrectomy system allowing patients with diabetes to now have access to world class retina surgical procedures, right in their own backyard," says Gisela Velez, MD, a highly skilled retina surgeon at Nashoba Valley Medical Center's Eye Care Institute. "A vitrectomy removes hemorrhages from diabetes complications and replaces it with clear fluid. The surgery helps slow vision loss, but it is not a cure."

People with diabetes are more likely to develop eye problems, such as cataracts and glaucoma, but the effect of diabetes on the retina is the main threat to vision. Damage to the retina is called diabetic retinopathy, a disease that can cause vision loss and in extreme cases complete blindness. According to the National Eye Institute, nearly half of those who have diabetes will develop some degree of diabetic retinopathy during their lifetimes. Retinal problems are caused by damage to the tiny blood vessels in the retina. These blood vessels may weaken gradually due to high blood pressure and high blood glucose. Eventually they may break, creating swelling and small hemorrhages that blur vision. In advanced cases new blood vessels can grow. These vessels may bleed, blocking vision.

Warning Signs

Often there are no early warning signs of diabetic retinopathy, so it's important to have your eyes checked annually. Contact your eye doctor if you notice any sudden changes in your vision, or symptoms such as:

- Blurry or double vision
- Rings, flashing lights or blank spots
- Dark or floating spots
- Pain or pressure in one or both of your eyes
- Trouble seeing things out of the corners of your eyes

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Preventive Steps

As you are managing your diabetes there are preventive steps you can take to care for your eyes, including:

Schedule a dilated eye exam.

To screen for diabetic retinopathy, eye drops are used to dilate (enlarge) the pupils. This gives the doctor a closer look at the retina and optic nerve to check for signs of damage or disease. Have an eye exam once a year even if your vision seems fine.

Control blood sugar levels.

The Diabetes Control and Complications Trial showed that better control of blood sugar levels slows the onset and progression of retinopathy. Check your blood glucose regularly and talk with your doctor about your target blood sugar levels.

Keep blood pressure and cholesterol under control.

Studies have shown that controlling elevated blood pressure and cholesterol can reduce the risk of vision loss. A healthy diet, regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and taking medications as prescribed can help manage blood pressure and cholesterol.

Don't smoke or use tobacco.

Smoking increases your risk of various diabetes complications, including diabetic retinopathy. Talk to your doctor about ways to quit.

"The best prevention for all negative side effects of diabetes is to keep blood sugars as close to the normal range as possible," explains Roshney Jacob, MD, an endocrinologist at Nashoba's Diabetes and Endocrine Center, the largest accredited center in the region. "This can be achieved through diet, exercise and appropriate medications."

Visit www.nashobamed.org/Diabetes-and-Endocrine-Center to learn more about the services provided at Nashoba's Diabetes and Endocrine Center.

*Source: National Eye Institute, www.nei.nih.gov
*Source: Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.org

1. Photographs of Vision with Diabetic Retinopathy. Npand. nei.nih.gov/health/diabetic/retinopathy. Web. 4 12 2015.



Person with normal vision



Person with diabetic retinopathy

Nashoba Opens Eye Care Institute and Welcomes Renowned Retina Surgeon

Nashoba Valley Medical Center has expanded its ophthalmic surgery services and recently welcomed Gisela Velez, MD, a highly skilled retina surgeon, to the medical staff. Dr. Velez



is the only retina surgeon practicing in the Nashoba Valley and joins Ophthalmologist Steven Brusie, MD, in performing eye surgery for patients at Nashoba's new Eye Care Institute. To schedule an appointment with Drs. Velez or Brusie, call 978-784-9990.

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