

November is Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month

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In the United States, diabetes is fast becoming one of the leading causes of blindness in adults. As of 2007, 23.6 million children and adults in the United States suffer from diabetes, and the number is still growing. Also, surprisingly, one third of persons with diabetes have not been diagnosed. One of the reasons for this disease being America's aging population and rising rates of obesity. This November being Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month, a campaign has been launched to create awareness about eye disease caused by diabetes. This is because; the earlier diabetes is diagnosed, followed by appropriate lifestyle changes and treatment, the better are the chances of avoiding vision loss and other health problems.

Although eye problems can be a cause of worry for the people with diabetes, most diabetics have only minor eye disorders. One of the major serious outcomes of the disease can be blindness or vision loss. Other problems include Diabetic Retinopathy, a condition which occurs in the persons with diabetes.

What is diabetic retinopathy?

The retina is full of tiny little blood vessels. Retinopathy is the damage to the blood vessels of the retina, caused by prolonged high blood glucose levels. The blood vessels can become enlarged or clogged when blood sugar is high. They can also become weak and rupture. The retina can even become detached from the back of the eye.

What might you experience if you have diabetic retinopathy?

- Blurry or double vision
- Floaters or dark patches in your vision
- If you have a detached retina, you may see flashes, dark spots or a "dark curtain" over part of your vision. A detached retina needs immediate medical attention.

Retinopathy is not always noticeable in the early stages. It can progress silently for years without noticeable symptoms. **Yearly eye exams are essential when you have diabetes.** It's also important to keep blood glucose levels as near to normal as possible to prevent retina damage. If you notice any changes in your vision, call your eye doctor immediately.