

## November: Diabetic Awareness Month

Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney disease, blindness, and amputation, yet nearly 25% of people who have it don't even know it. Chances are, you – or someone you love – have been affected by diabetes in some way. But even if you haven't been affected by diabetes, you need to know that diabetes is the biggest public health crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it continues to grow to epidemic proportions. Approximately 29 million adults in the United States have diabetes. It has been estimated that 8% of the Washington DC metro area population has diabetes, and 18% of those go undiagnosed. The death rate for diabetes has continued to grow since 1987, while the death rates due to heart disease, stroke and cancer have declined.

Having diabetes places a person at increased risk for a number of serious, even life-threatening complications, including:

- **Heart disease and stroke** - Adults with diabetes have heart disease death rates about 2 to 4 times higher than adults without diabetes.
- **Blindness** - Diabetic retinopathy causes 12,000 to 24,000 new cases of blindness each year making diabetes the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age.
- **Kidney disease** - Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, accounting for 44% of new cases in 2002.
- **Amputations** - More than 60% of non-traumatic lower-limb amputations occur in people with diabetes.

Since early symptoms often go unnoticed, vision may not be affected until the disease is severe and less easily treated.

### DIABETIC EYE DISEASE

Diabetic eye disease, a group of eye problems that affects those with diabetes, includes diabetic retinopathy, cataracts and glaucoma. The most common of these is diabetic retinopathy which affects 5.3 million Americans age 18 and older.

Diabetic retinopathy is a potentially blinding condition in which the blood vessels inside the retina become damaged from the high sugar levels associated with diabetes. This leads to fluids leaking into the retina and obstructing blood flow. Both may cause severe vision loss.

Diabetes can also affect your vision by causing cataracts and glaucoma. If you have diabetes, you may get cataracts at a younger age, and your chances of developing glaucoma are doubled.

**Please call 703-827-5454 or 877-234-2020 to make an appointment with one of our doctors.**

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## Glaucoma

People with diabetes are 40% more likely to suffer from glaucoma than people without diabetes. The longer someone has diabetes, the more common glaucoma is. Risk also increases with age.

Glaucoma occurs when pressure builds up in the eye. In most cases, the pressure causes drainage of the aqueous humor to slow down so that it builds up in the anterior chamber. The pressure pinches the blood vessels that carry blood to the retina and optic nerve. Vision is gradually lost because the retina and nerve are damaged.

There are several treatments for glaucoma. Some use drugs to reduce pressure in the eye, while others involve surgery.

## Cataracts

People with diabetes tend to get cataracts at a younger age, and have them progress faster. With cataracts, the eye's clear lens gets cloudy, blocking light. To help deal with mild cataracts, you may need to wear sunglasses more often and use glare-control lenses in your glasses. For cataracts that interfere greatly with vision, the natural lens is removed and replaced with another lens. New advances in the surgery offer patients specialty lenses which can reduce the need for glasses after surgery.

## Early Diagnosis

Early diagnosis of diabetes and, most importantly, maintaining strict control of blood sugar and hypertension through diet, exercise and medication, can help reduce your risk of developing eye disease associated with diabetes.

## When to See Your Eye Doctor

Once you are diagnosed with diabetes, schedule a complete dilated examination with your eye doctor at least once a year. Make an appointment promptly if you experience blurred vision and/or floaters that:

- Affect only one eye;
- Last more than a few days;
- Are not associated with a change in blood sugar.

*For more information about American Diabetes Month, please visit the American Diabetes Association at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) or call 1-888-DIABETES (1-888-342-2382).*

**See Clearly Vision and Cornea Consultants** include multiple medical practices that have served patients in the mid-Atlantic region for over ten years. As part of our service line, we treat patients for Diabetes and Glaucoma management, and we perform Advanced Cataract Surgery, including specialty lens implants. Please contact us if you would like more information, or to schedule an appointment with one of our doctors.

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