

# Vision Care: Diabetic Eye Disease

## *Information for high-risk individuals*

Diabetics are at a significantly increased risk for developing a wide range of problems affecting the eyes, including the potential for vision loss.

### **Diabetic Eye Disease**

Diabetic eye disease refers to a group of eye problems that can affect people with diabetes or pre-diabetes, as well as individuals with prolonged exposure to high blood sugar levels. These conditions all have the potential to cause severe and permanent vision loss or blindness. Diabetic eye disease includes the following conditions:

- *Diabetic retinopathy* – Damage to the blood vessels in the retina which can often be a sign of damage to other organs.
- *Cataracts* – Clouding of the lens of the eye which often develops earlier in diabetics.
- *Glaucoma* – An increase in fluid pressure inside the eye leading to optic nerve damage; vision loss is twice as likely to develop in a diabetic.

### **Prevention**

Because diabetic eye disease often presents no warning signs, finding and treating the

disease is challenging. If you have diabetes, make sure you have a dilated eye exam which will allow your doctor to see the inside of your eyes and check for signs of disease at least once a year.

Keeping your diabetes under control is the best way to control the development or progression of diabetic eye disease. Watch your diet, exercise, monitor your blood sugars and take your diabetes medications. If you have already been diagnosed and treated for diabetic eye disease and are still experiencing vision problems, be sure to follow up with your doctor as soon as possible. If you are at high risk for diabetes and begin experiencing changes in your vision, especially blurred vision, having an eye exam and being tested for diabetes is extremely important.

### **Treatment**

Medical treatment of diabetic eye disease is generally directed

at the underlying problem – the diabetes. Better diabetic control dramatically decreases your chances of developing diabetic eye disease. Your eye care professional may also suggest laser surgery as a treatment option for conditions such as diabetic retinopathy. Laser surgery, along with the appropriate follow-up care, may reduce the risk of blindness by 90 percent. However, it cannot restore vision that has already been lost – which is why it is so important for diabetics and those at high risk to have annual eye exams.



## **Did you know...?**

Vision changes are often the first sign of diabetes in an individual. Many cases of diabetes are actually identified for the first time during an eye exam.