

Safety Talk

Diabetic Eye Disease

Diabetes is a group of diseases characterized by high blood glucose (sugar) levels that result from defects in the body's ability to produce and/or use insulin. You may be wondering what blood sugar has to do with vision and the fast answer is a lot; diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in those ages 20 to 74.

If you or someone in your family has diabetes, awareness about vision is crucial to prevent or at least slow the loss of vision. Occasional high blood sugar can cause changes to your ability to see, most typically causing blurred vision. High blood sugar causes the lens of your eye to change shape, affecting your ability to see. This blurring can usually be corrected by closely monitoring your blood sugar but can take up to three months for your vision to return to normal.

Blurry vision can also be a symptom of a more serious eye problem for someone with diabetes. There are three major eye issues that are especially common in someone that is diabetic; cataracts, glaucoma and retinopathy.

A cataract is when the clear lens of the eye becomes clouded or foggy. The lens is the part of the eye that allows light in and the eye to focus on objects, similar to a lens in a camera. When it becomes clouded or foggy, less light passes into the eye and the lens is less able to focus on things. While anyone can develop a cataract, if you have diabetes you are 60% more likely to develop cataracts. People with diabetes also tend to get cataracts at a younger age and have them progress faster. You can help prevent and deal with mild cataracts by wearing sunglasses outside and using glare-control lenses in your glasses. When a cataract has progressed to a point where your vision is compromised, surgery can be done to replace the damaged lens.

Glaucoma is caused by inadequate drainage of the fluid in your eye. This causes the fluid to build up and an increase the pressure in your eye which can damage the optic nerve or the nerve that carries information about vision to the brain. This damage to the nerve causes changes in your vision, even blindness in severe cases. People with diabetes are 40% more likely to suffer from glaucoma than people without diabetes.

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The longer someone has had diabetes, the more common glaucoma is. The risk of developing glaucoma also increases with age. There are several treatments for glaucoma, including drugs that reduce pressure in the eye as well as surgical options.

Diabetic retinopathy is the most common of the eye diseases affecting the diabetic. It is caused by changes in the blood vessels that service the retina in the back of the eye. The retina is a group of specialized nerve cells that convert light into the images that you see. Damage to these tiny blood vessels cause damage to your vision in many possible ways, most of which is irreversible. Retinopathy is more common if you have had diabetes a long time, or if your blood glucose or blood pressure haven't been under good control.

While those with diabetes are at an increased risk of vision problems, most people with diabetes have no or only minor eye disorders. You can prevent or minimize the damage of serious eye problems by getting an annual dilated eye exam by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. Many eye problems are silent until they are advanced, but early detection and treatment truly saves vision. The American Diabetes Association recommends the best ways to prevent eye problems associated with diabetes is to control your blood sugar and to control high blood pressure..

Discussion Questions

Why are these eye diseases more common in those people that have diabetes?

What is a cataract?

MEETING / TRAINING ATTENDANCE ROSTER

COMPANY: _____

_____ SAFETY MEETING

JOB/DEPT: _____

_____ SAFETY TRAINING

DATE: ____/____/____

TIME: _____

TOPICS ADDRESSED: _____

EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURES

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EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

ACTION TAKEN: _____

Supervisor's Signature

____/____/____
Date

Safety Coordinator's Signature

____/____/____
Date