

## RETINA CONSULTANTS OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

# Diabetics can take steps to reduce risk of blindness

**A**bout 8.3 percent of the population of the United States have diabetes. That's 25.8 million children and adults, according to data from the 2011 National Diabetes Fact Sheet.

The American Diabetes Association says people with diabetes are 40 percent more likely to develop glaucoma, 60 percent more likely to develop cataracts, and the majority of diabetics will develop some form of diabetic retinopathy.

Glaucoma occurs when pressure builds up in the eye. The retina and optic nerve can become permanently damaged, resulting in irreversible vision loss. There are many successful treatments available to prevent permanent vision loss from glaucoma such as eye drops, lasers and surgical treatments.

Cataract is the clouding of the natural lens of the eye. This can cause glare, halos and blurry vision. Cataract surgery can be done to remove cataracts, but people with diabetes can sometimes have complications after successful cataract surgery.

Diabetic retinopathy refers to retinal disorders caused by diabetes. There are several stages of severity of diabetic retinopathy that can involve retinal blood vessel damage, bleeding, swelling and abnormal blood vessel growth. This can also result in loss of vision, sometimes permanently. Treatment for



**DR. ASHISH SHARMA**  
Retina Consultants of Southwest Florida

these complications includes laser treatment, eye injections and sometimes surgery, if necessary.

There are many steps diabetics can take to help prevent vision loss:

- » Keeping your blood sugar under control can reduce your risk of eye disease by 76 percent! The Diabetes Control and Complications trial was conducted from 1983 to 1993 by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases and showed that it is beneficial to keep blood sugar as close to normal as possible. Doing this can slow down the progression of eye, kidney, and nerve disease. It is important to monitor your blood sugar as recommended by your doctor.

- » Keep your blood pressure under control. High or fluctuating blood pressure can cause blood vessel damage.

- » Do not smoke. Smoking can also affect blood vessels and can exacerbate other eye conditions such as cataracts, age-related macular degeneration and ocular inflam-

mation.

- » See an eye care provider regularly for dilated eye examinations, according to American Academy of Ophthalmology Guidelines:

- » Type 1 diabetes: You should have a dilated eye exam three to five years after diagnosed with diabetes, then every year or more often if your eye doctor recommends.

- » Type 2 diabetes: You should have dilated eye exam at the time of diagnosis of diabetes, then every year or more often if your eye doctor recommends.

- » Have a dilated eye exam if you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, then again early in the first trimester and more often if your eye doctor recommends.

- » Have a dilated eye exam if you have any changes in your vision.

- » Stay healthy. Good overall health is vital to successful management of diabetic eye disease. In general, habits that are healthy for your body are also helpful to your eyes. These habits include eating a well-balanced diet according to the recommendations of your doctor, exercising regularly, and taking your medications as prescribed.

- » Educate yourself and communicate with your doctors. Your general medical doctor/endocrinologist and your eye care professional can give you the tools you need to be able to learn

more about diabetes and the effect it has on your vision.

Visit [diabetes.org](http://diabetes.org) or [eye.md](http://eye.md) to learn more about diabetes and diabetic eye disease.

— Dr. Ashish Sharma is a board-certified ophthalmologist specializing in diseases of the retina and vitreous with Retina Consultants of Southwest Florida with offices in Fort Myers, Cape Coral, Port Charlotte and Naples. The Fort Myers office is located at 6901 International Center Blvd. Call 939-4323 or visit [www.eye.md](http://www.eye.md).

**Fort Myers**  
**466-2020**  
6091 S. Pointe Blvd.

**Cape Coral**  
**451-1138**  
1138 S. ...