What Is Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in adults. It occurs when diabetes damages blood vessels inside the eye. These weak vessels leak fluid into an area of the eye called the retina. New, distorted vessels may grow, then bleed. These vessels can damage areas of the retina, causing blurry, distorted vision.

What Causes Diabetic Retinopathy?

Diabetes is the cause of this eye disease. Over time, diabetes makes blood vessels weaken all over the body, including in the eyes. Poor blood sugar control can make retinopathy worse. So can smoking or poorly controlled high blood pressure. Pregnancy can also cause retinopathy to worsen.

What Are the Symptoms?

You can have diabetic retinopathy without knowing it. Usually, there is no pain and no outward sign. Over time, you may notice gradual blurring or some vision loss. Symptoms may come and go. Early treatment and good control of risk factors may help prevent vision loss or blindness.

What You Can Do

Have your eyes examined regularly by an eye specialist. Your healthcare provider will tell you when and how often you need these exams. You can also help control your diabetes through exercise, diet, and medicine, as instructed by your healthcare provider. These same steps may also help control diabetic retinopathy.

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