



Amigos de la Gente de Edad

## Diabetic retinopathy

### What is it?

Diabetic retinopathy is an ocular complication of diabetes due to the deterioration of the blood vessels that feed the rear of the eye. Weak vessels can seep liquid or blood, thus damaging the retina tissue.

### Who suffers it?

Any diabetic can be affected by diabetic retinopathy. Approximately 60% of people suffering from diabetes over a period of 14 - 15 years have damaged blood vessels in the rear of the eye.

### How is it detected?

All diabetics should have an eye test by an ophthalmologist at least once a year. After dilating the pupil with drops, the interior of the eye is examined. On certain occasions an angiofluoresceingraph is used.

### What are the usual symptoms?

Unfortunately usually no symptom is detected until the illness has already reached a very serious state.

- **Blurry vision** appears when there is Macula Edema - i.e. when the part of the retina that controls central vision is affected by liquid that escapes from damaged blood vessels.
- **Seriously reduced vision** when the illness reaches a more serious stage and new blood vessels have grown on the surface of the retina causing hemorrhage inside the eye. Vision diminishes or disappears. The patient needs to go to a specialist immediately.

### What is the treatment?

Diagnosis and treatment depends on age, medical history, degree of the damage to the retina and the patient's life-style.

The damage caused is treated by laser photocoagulation but often this does not improve vision. The success of the treatment depends mostly on the patient's own care. Medication and the correct diet for diabetics must be followed. Patients with proliferative retinopathy should not carry out strenuous exercise nor force themselves too much.

**What is laser photocoagulation?**

In this treatment, a powerful beam of luminous laser energy closes up the blood vessels that are seeping liquid or blood. This stops any increase in the damaged areas and prevents any more loss in vision.

The minute scars that form within the eye not only reduce the formation of abnormal blood vessels but also help to secure the retina to the rear of the eye.

Patients with other ocular illnesses such as:

- Vascular thrombosis
- Macular Degeneration
- Detached retinas

may also benefit from this surgery:

The process avoids incisions and can be carried out in an outpatients' department or ophthalmologist's own surgery.

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