

ASK THE EXPERT

sponsored by Doctors Hospital at Renaissance

Guadalupe A. Flores, O.D. | The Vision Care Center at Renaissance



Can you explain how diabetes affects your vision?



Question: With diabetes so prevalent in this area, can you explain how it can affect vision? I've heard of people suffering from double vision and even some losing sight altogether. Is there anything that can be done to "cure" double vision?

Answer: Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in industrialized countries. Diabetes is a condition that decreases the circulation of oxygen rich blood through the body. It can cause damage to the blood vessels, vital organs (heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, eyes and brain), nerves, muscles and skin. Uncontrolled diabetes invites

other diseases to appear such as high blood pressure and cholesterol, and may result in limb amputation. People may even experience discomfort and pain while performing certain tasks. This affects the way they go about their daily lives and alters their self-esteem. It is important to treat and manage diabetes as early as possible.

It is recommended to have a complete eye exam, which includes a dilation of the pupils at least once a year in order to monitor eye health closely. Diabetes affects the eyes from the outside to the inside and puts patients at risk for glaucoma, an eye disease that has no symptoms, causing gradual vision loss and eventual blindness if untreated. Due

to poor blood circulation, the eye also creates weak blood vessels in an attempt to feed the eye much needed oxygen. Unfortunately, these new vessels are prone to rupture and leak which can lead to eventual blindness. Eye muscles that control eye movement can develop nerve damage resulting in diplopia (double vision). Diplopia can occur when a patient's blood glucose is too high, or it can be a much more serious cause which may lead to death. An immediate visit to your medical doctor is necessary to determine the correct cause; once your medical doctor confirms that your double vision is caused only by nerve damage from diabetes, the next step is to stabilize your blood

glucose level. After this, it is necessary for you to visit your optometrist or ophthalmologist to help manage your double vision. He or she will choose the best option for you.

Oftentimes, people do not visit their medical doctor regularly until they feel really ill. They may end up in the hospital for something that could have been prevented. Diabetics can have a great quality of life by keeping a positive attitude, making healthy changes in their diet, leading a more active lifestyle and by considering the guidance of a nutritionist. Having a compassionate primary care physician is also vital to success. Above all, being "pro-active" in managing one's own health is essential.