



## **Diabetic Eye Disease**

**By Stacie Nichols, OD, Davenport Vision Source**

Diabetic retinopathy is one of a group of eye problems, including cataracts and glaucoma that may develop as a complication of diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy causes blood vessels in the retina to become fragile, leak fluid and swell the retina leading to blurred vision. The longer a person has diabetes, the greater the chance that you will develop diabetic retinopathy. Diabetics are 25 times more likely to lose vision than someone without the disease.



Approximately 16 million people in America, and 308,000 in Washington State, have diabetes, and one-third do not even know it. Of those cases that are diagnosed, between 40 and 45 percent have some degree of diabetic retinopathy, a potentially blinding eye disease that is a complication of diabetes.

Early diabetic retinopathy often has no corresponding symptoms. Therefore, a patient may not notice visual changes until the disease has significantly progressed. With early detection, routine monitoring, and timely treatment with laser surgery, vision can be saved in more than 90 percent of those who would otherwise become blind from the disease. That's why it's important for people with diabetes to have a dilated eye exam at least once a year.

People with diabetes can slow the onset and progression of diabetic retinopathy and reduce the likelihood of vision loss through better control of blood sugar levels. A medically supervised program of diet and exercise is a great way to help control blood sugar levels. Dr. Nichols urges people with diabetes to take the initiative and call their eye care professional to schedule this exam. A good time to schedule the exam is the month of November – National Diabetes Month – so you don't forget.

Medicare beneficiaries with diabetes who have not had an eye exam in the past two years can call the American Optometric Association Diabetes Hotline at 1-800-262-3947 to learn about a free screening program.