

Health Watch -- Diabetic Eye Disease

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What can an eye exam tell a doctor about a diabetic's health?

May is national Healthy Vision Month, and it's a good time to remind you of how important your eyes are. For diabetics, this is an especially important reminder.

Blindness is a possible complication of diabetes. One common cause of blindness in diabetics is diabetic retinopathy. This condition is caused by damage to blood vessels in the eyes. Doctors at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas say a regular eye exam is as important for managing diabetes as monitoring blood sugar and watching your diet.

Not only can doctors diagnose diabetic retinopathy through an eye exam, they also gain other clues about a patient's health. Dr. Yu-Guang He, a UT Southwestern ophthalmologist, says eyes are like windows to your whole body. Looking at the blood vessels in your eyes can give doctors an idea of damage that might have been caused by diabetes in the rest of your body.

Diabetic retinopathy causes no symptoms in its early stages. An eye exam allows doctors to see any lesions caused by diabetes. If they detect these lesions early enough, doctors may be able to get better results with treatment and stop the damage before it becomes irreversible.

Diabetics should regular eye exams. If you wait until you notice problems, it may be too late to save your sight.

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May 2004