

I was diagnosed with diabetes five years ago and have been having difficulty with my vision, which has affected my driving, performance at work and reading. What should I do?

If you have diabetes, management of your blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure is important to lessen the negative impact the disease can have on your life. Diabetes is a progressive disease with systemic risks that include increased risk of falls, impaired range of motion, neurological and cardiovascular disease, peripheral neuropathy, compromised wound healing, decreased blood flow and amputation. Several factors have been identified that contribute to the increasing problem, including obesity, calorie-rich diets, sedentary lifestyles, depression and lack of general well being.

If you experience vision loss and have diabetes, you should immediately make an appointment with your optometrist or ophthalmologist to determine the cause of your reduced vision. You may have diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy causes small blood vessels that line your retina to weaken, eventually rupturing, blurring your vision and causing swelling. There are usually no early symptoms of diabetic retinopathy. You may not know anything is wrong until vision loss occurs. If diabetic retinopathy is untreated, about half of all cases will result in blindness.

The severity of diabetic retinopathy can be minimized significantly with proper diagnosis and care. Meticulous diabetes care, managing a healthy lifestyle, quitting smoking, and appropriate management by an ophthalmologist and retina specialist can stabilize the disease and reduce vision loss. For the two most common complications, macular edema and proliferative retinopathy, laser and local drug therapy can improve short and long-term outcomes. Laser treatment for proliferative retinopathy can prevent blindness, though peripheral vision may be reduced. Pharmacological therapy directly to the eye may also be used to stabilize diabetic retinopathy.

Early referral for low vision rehabilitation, even for patients with near normal vision to mild visual impairment, greatly increases chances of an independent and healthy life.

An evaluation by a low vision rehabilitation team consisting of a low vision practitioner (optometrist or an ophthalmologist), a certified low vision therapist, an occupational therapist and/or orientation & mobility specialist can dramatically improve visual function, while providing patient education, resources, therapeutic interventions and environmental adaptations, resulting in enhanced quality of life.

Prescription changes can also improve visual acuity and performance in most daily activities such as driving, working, reading and self-care.

If you have diabetes and have vision loss that affects your life, talk to your eye doctor about a referral for a low vision evaluation and rehabilitation. Low vision rehabilitation can improve your visual function and restore your independence.

You can also call us at (316) 440-1690 and we will be happy to discuss whether an appointment is appropriate for you.