**What You Need to Know About Diabetic Retinopathy**

Diabetes can harm your eyes. The excessive amount of glucose circulating in the blood stream can damage the small blood vessels in your *retina*, the back part of your eye. This is called *diabetic retinopathy* (dī-ə-'be-tik re-tō-'nä-pə-thē).

Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in working-age Americans. People with type 1 and type 2 diabetes are at risk for this condition. It affects up to 80% of all patients who have had diabetes for 10 years or more. The longer a person has diabetes, the higher his or her chances of developing diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetes also increases your risk of having glaucoma, cataracts, and other eye problems.

**Symptoms**

The retina is the layer of tissue at the back of the inner eye. It changes light and images that enter the eye into nerve signals that are sent to the brain which enables us to “see” things. Often, there are no symptoms until the damage to the eyes is severe. Symptoms may include blurred vision and slow vision loss over time, floaters, shadows or missing areas of vision, and/or trouble seeing at night.

**Signs and Tests**

Blocked blood vessels or vessels that are larger in certain spots, small amounts of bleeding and fluid leaking from the vessels, and/or abnormal growth of new, fragile vessels are signs that an eye doctor looks for during a diabetic eye exam. Regular diabetic eye exams are vitally important to the continued health of your eyes, as well as your continued ability to see.

Your doctor has recommended a yearly screening for diabetic retinopathy. We have a special camera in our office that is capable of taking photographs of your retina. These photographs are examined by an ophthalmologist who is then able to provide recommendations for continued treatment. Following your first examination, the screenings will be done yearly. If there is need for further treatment, your doctor will discuss those options with you.

**Follow-Up Eye Care**

The retinal screening pictures do not replace your regular eye examinations with your ophthalmologist. Please tell your eye doctor that pictures have been taken of your retinas so that the pictures are not taken again at their office. We are happy to share those pictures with your ophthalmologist. It is important that you continue seeing your eye doctor for regular checkups,
as well as for any issues that require regular visits and specialized treatment, including vision care and monitoring for cataracts and/or glaucoma.