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Millions at Risk for Blindness Due to Diabetes

Ophthalmologists urge diabetics to schedule eye exam during Diabetic Eye Disease Month

Pensacola, Fla. - More than one third of diabetics in America do not have an annual dilated eye exam as recommended, putting them at risk for vision loss and blindness. In support of November's Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month, Retina Specialty Institute is joining ophthalmologists across the country to urge diabetics to schedule their yearly exam. If you are pregnant and diabetic, you should have an eye exam in your first trimester, as diabetic eye disease can progress rapidly during pregnancy.

Diabetic retinopathy, a degenerative disease of the retina and a leading cause of blindness, increases each year a patient has diabetes however it can appear within the first year or two after the onset. For some, diabetic retinopathy is the first noticed symptom of the disease.

"Blindness due to diabetes is preventable," said Dr. Sunil Gupta, retina specialist. "However patients need to be seeing their eye care specialists at least once a year because often damage occurs without any visual symptoms."

High blood sugar levels can weaken blood vessels in the retina causing them to leak blood or fluid. The leakage produces swelling and can lead to vision loss. Blood sugar fluctuations can also promote growth of new, fragile blood vessels on the retina, which can break easily and leak blood into the vitreous (the clear, jelly-like substance that fills the center of the eye.) This can blur vision and lead to permanent vision impairment.

Fluctuations in blood sugar levels can temporarily affect vision and it is sometimes difficult to know if a serious eye problem is developing. Vision changes in one eye only, a change that lasts more than a day or two, or changes unassociated with fluctuations in blood sugar, should be checked promptly by an ophthalmologist.

Retina Specialty Institute, treating retinal diseases including diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration, has offices throughout Northwest Florida and South Alabama. For more information, call 850-476-6759 or visit www.retinaspecialty.com.

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