Diabetes and the Eye

Diabetes is a systemic disease that can have significant effects on the eyes. It is the most common cause of legal blindness in individuals between the age of 20 and 65 years of age. Because of this statistic it is important for diabetics to have yearly dilated eye exams, allowing timely diagnosis of ocular complications and a reduced risk of vision loss.

Complications of diabetes:

Diabetic Retinopathy is the result of vascular issues in the retina. This leads to bleeding and fluid build-up in the retinal tissue. In addition the decrease in oxygen that occurs in certain situations can lead to swelling and edema. If untreated scarring and retinal detachment can occur leading to vision loss. Diabetic Cataracts can result from fluctuations in blood glucose. Like age related cataracts they can reduce vision and in some cases need to be surgically removed. Unlike age related cataracts, the onset is not dependent on age. Refractive (Vision) shifts are another effect of elevated blood sugar. These dramatic changes in eye focus are most often temporary. The duration of these changes are dependent upon the degree to which the blood sugar rises. Increased risk of infection occurs in diabetics due to decreased immune responses and healing rates. Diabetics should be especially careful with red or irritated eyes as infections may not cause them the same amount of discomfort as other patients and may be significantly more difficult to treat. Increased risk of other ocular disease such as glaucoma, macular degeneration and eye muscle conditions.

Risks of complications increase with:

* Patients who require insulin for control
* Young age at onset of Diabetes
* Pregnancy
* Concurrent renal disease, hypertension, and high cholesterol
* Poor Blood Sugar Control
* Smoking

Treatments:

Treatments depend on the condition present and can vary from observation and diabetes treatment modifications to surgical intervention when vision is threatened.

The UHC Vision Clinic is available to students, student's spouses/partners, faculty/staff, and dependents. It offers the full range of optometric care as well as a large retail inventory of frames and lenses. Appointments are necessary and can be made online (students) or by phone. Call 706-542-5617 or visit http://www.uhs.uga.edu/services/vision_clinic.html