



PRESS RELEASE

TO: Editor in Charge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Diabetics Urged to Know and Understand Retinopathy

Diabetes Patients are at High-Risk to Suffer Retina Disorders

(Honolulu, Hawaii), November 8, 2007 –Doctors estimate there are 2.4 million people worldwide who are blind due to a diabetic eye disease known as Diabetic Retinopathy. Each year 24,000 Americans become blind due to Diabetic Retinopathy, which is one of the leading causes of blindness in the U.S. As a result, the American Academy of Ophthalmology has declared November to be Diabetic Eye Disease Awareness Month.

Physicians agree that there are four major factors that influence whether a diabetic patient will develop retinopathy; blood sugar control, blood pressure, length of time living with diabetes and genetic inclination. For diabetics across the nation, it may seem as if they have no control over whether they develop retinopathy. This, however, is not true. Modifications in lifestyle and the help of doctors and nutritionists can help prevent eye disease in many with diabetes

“Retinopathy is simply any condition that affects the eye’s retina,” said Dr. Christopher Tortora, Medical Director at the Hawaiian Eye Center. “The retina is located at the back of the eye and registers images and sends them to the brain. Diabetic patients often suffer from a form of Retinopathy where blood vessels in the back of the eye become weak, cause bleeding into the back of the eye, and the blood vessels may eventually become blocked.”

There are two forms of Retinopathy. The more common and less dangerous Non-proliferative Retinopathy actually occurs in most individuals who live with diabetes for many years. Non-proliferative Retinopathy can take three forms, mild, moderate and severe, and initially forms as capillaries in the eye begin to bulge and form pouches. Over time, blood vessels can become blocked. Usually this type of Retinopathy does not cause vision loss in its early stages, but can require treatment to prevent vision loss in its more advanced stages. It is important to see an eye physician to diagnose Non-proliferative Retinopathy, as it can lead to macula edema and other changes resulting in loss of vision.

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When the capillaries and blood vessels in the eye can no longer regulate the movement of substances between the blood and retina there is a risk of fluid begining to leak into the area where vision focus is controlled, called the macula. This condition is known as macula edema and must be treated to prevent vision loss.

Over time, Non-proliferative Retinopathy can degenerate into a more severe condition called Proliferative Retinopathy. For patients suffering from this disease, their blood vessels are so swollen they have closed. To compensate the eye attempts to grow new blood vessels, which tend to be weak and put the individual at risk for Vitreous Hemorrhage (bleeding inside the eye) if the new blood vessels leak. Through a vitreous hemorrhage, diabetics with Proliferative Retinopathy stand to lose their vision.

Proliferative Retinopathy has also been known to cause detached retinas. As the new blood vessels form, they can create scar tissue. As the scar tissue shrinks it can pull the retina in a number of ways or distort it, also leading to vision loss.

"The dangerous thing about Diabetic Retinopathy is that many of its victims do not notice any symptoms early on, Dr. Tortora said." "Sometimes patients may be suffering from severe Retinopathy conditions and not even know until it is too late to repair the damage. This is why it is essential to see your eye doctor regularly. He or she can check not only for Retinopathy, but also for glaucoma and cataracts, also more common in diabetics, and make sure that if any of these conditions are present they are treated quickly before permanent damage is done." "We recommend an eye exam at least once a year for all diabetics, and more frequently if changes are discovered in the eye that may require treatment.

Dr. Tortora, a board certified ophthalmologist, is host of "The Hawaiian Eye Show," a weekly informational radio program about healthy vision. He and his colleagues at Hawaiian Eye Center are committed to educating the public about the importance of preventative eye care. To learn more about a variety of eye health issues, please call the Hawaiian Eye Center at 621-8488 where "*life has never looked better.*"

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