

# Health + Watch



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## Diabetes is leading cause of blindness in ages 20-74



Dr. Heath Bullard of Cleburne Eye Clinic screens a patient for diabetic retinopathy at his office at 110 W. Henderson St., a block west of the Courthouse.

BY JAMI SHELTON

Did you know vision problems could be a sign of diabetes? Nearly 23 million Americans are affected by diabetes, and nearly one-third of them don't even know they have it. Left undiagnosed, diabetes can result in vision impairment, a frequent complication of both Type-1 and Type-2 diabetes, and even blindness.

Diabetic retinopathy, a diabetes-related eye disease, is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among adults 20-74 years old. Through a comprehensive dilated eye exam, the therapeutic optometrists at Cleburne Eye Clinic can look inside the eye and examine blood vessels directly, detecting signs and symptoms of retinopathy.

Dr. Heath Bullard, one of the therapeutic optometrists at Cleburne Eye Clinic, said the number of cases of diabetes is definitely on the rise.

"Thirty percent of all vision loss caused by diabetes could have been prevented, if caught early," Bullard said. "That's why we check your retina at every eye exam; we have equipment to image all 10 layers of the retina, which allows for the earliest possible detection of diabetic eye disease."

"Diabetes causes the blood vessel walls to weaken so they can leak blood and fluid into the retinal tissue, and once that tissue is damaged, it's not repairable. We work with retinal specialists to treat the leakage, using laser therapy, injectable medicines or surgery, in an attempt to prevent damage to the vision."

Bullard said in many cases the laser is able to seal the leak and they then monitor the patient's progress. Or, they inject medicines to the inside of the eye to reduce leakage and swelling. If those treatments are not effective, surgery may be required.

Symptoms of diabetic eye disease may include:

- Fluctuating or blurring of vision
- Occasional double vision
- Night vision problems
- Flashers and floaters seen by one or both eyes
- Missing areas in the field of vision

If you have any of these symptoms or if you haven't had an eye exam in over a year, the doctors at Cleburne Eye Clinic are here to help by providing dilated eye examinations to screen for diabetic retinopathy.

Bullard said on many occasions they've been the ones to diagnose diabetes and other medical conditions in their patients who had no other symptoms.

"We can uncover unique signs that may even save someone's life," he said. "The effects of numerous systemic diseases including diabetes, high blood pressure, anemia, and elevated blood cholesterol can be seen during a dilated eye exam because the eye is the only place within the body that blood vessels can be seen in their natural state. For this very reason, Leonardo DaVinci often referred to the eye as the 'window to the body.'"

"If we detect something during an eye examination that makes us suspect diabetes, we'll have one of our clinical services technicians check the patient's blood sugar level in our office. Then we work with the patient's primary care physician to determine the best treatment options."

Bullard said 12,000 to 24,000 people unnecessarily lose their vision yearly from diabetes complications that can often be prevented through early detection and timely treatment.

If it's been a year or longer since you've had a comprehensive eye exam, there's no time like the present. Call Cleburne Eye Clinic today for an appointment at 817-645-2411. If you are on a medical insurance plan, your insurance will cover your eye exam. So don't put off a visit that just might save your sight!

Cleburne Eye Clinic has been serving the people of Johnson and surrounding counties for more than 60 years. They're on almost every vision plan and most medical plans and can usually get patients an appointment within a week with Saturday hours and late hours available and have a 24-hour answering service on call should an emergency arise.

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