

Transcript Details

This is a transcript of an educational program. Details about the program and additional media formats for the program are accessible by visiting: <https://reachmd.com/national-eye-institute/nei-blindness-prevention-initiative/addressing-diabetic-retinopathy-a-way-forward/13126/>

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www.reachmd.com
info@reachmd.com
(866) 423-7849

Patient Education: Addressing Diabetic Retinopathy: A Way Forward

Dr. Wycoff:

Hi, I'm Charles Wycoff, a retina specialist in Houston, Texas, and diabetes has affected the back of your eye. The key problem here is that diabetes causes damage to the small blood vessels throughout the back of the eye. And the back of the eye has a lot of blood vessels. What happens then is that the remaining blood vessels become leaky. And the blood vessels that remain, they leak fluid, they leak blood, they leak proteins and fats out into the retina; the retina can become swollen and dysfunctional. When that happens, people begin to notice visual decline and visual loss. The good thing is in many cases, this is very treatable with repeated injections of medicines into the eye.

And it sounds scary, and it is a little bit; it's injections of medicines directly inside of the eye. And I say it very clearly because I want you to know exactly what we're doing. We're taking really small needles and putting them inside of your eye and injecting the medicine directly into the middle of the ball of your eye called the vitreous cavity. And that medicine then diffuses back into the retina and stops those blood vessels from leaking and will improve the fluid and improve the health of the back of the eye.

I know it sounds scary, but the vast majority of patients do very well with these injections. We numb the eye up ahead of time so you will not have any pain. You might have a little bit of irritation after the injection. And most of the time, that is from a solution called Betadine that we use to sterilize and prevent any infection when giving these injections.

Sometimes patients will have floaters and things that they see moving around inside their vision. Those often also go away very quickly. And then finally, there can sometimes be a little red spot on the white part of your eye on the outside of your eye. Again, in most cases, this will go away very quickly.

It is worth knowing, though, every time we put a needle anywhere inside the body, there's a risk of infection. And therefore, if you have any problems after the injection, new pain, new vision loss, anything you're worried about, always make sure that you feel comfortable reaching out to your doctor and your doctor's team at any time in case there is an infection that needs to be treated emergently.

And finally, let me just say that I'm glad that you're engaging in your care. Treatment for diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular edema are highly effective. These medicines really work to prevent vision loss and improve vision in many patients. I'm glad that you're engaging.

And the last point to remember is this is a long-term treatment pattern. These are not cures. They're highly effective, so please make the effort to get to know your doctor and their team because I hope that you'll be seeing them regularly over the many months and years to come so that you can enjoy the best vision possible. Thank you, and good luck.