

## Sight Savers: Preventing vision loss from diabetes

When was the last time you noticed how wonderful it is to enjoy the simplest of life's pleasures — like reading books and watching TV?

We're so busy with the "big things," the little things often go unnoticed. Unless you're like a retired schoolteacher and patient of VSP doctor Anastasios Fokas, O.D.

Dr. Fokas' patient had been recently diagnosed with diabetes. Troubling enough, for sure. But, no one told her that a common effect of the disease is a specific eye condition. And it's no little thing at all. In fact, diabetic retinopathy now affects 5 million Americans and causes 20,000 new cases of blindness each year.

For Dr. Fokas' patient, the timing of her eye exam couldn't have been better. She went in thinking it was just an ordinary exam to get new glasses. But, the 67-year old retiree got a lot more — the gift of vision saved.

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That's because Dr. Fokas noticed that the newly diagnosed diabetic already had signs of retinopathy — in the form of weakened blood vessels that were leaking various fluids into the retinas of her eyes.

That leaking impairs vision, and if left unchecked, ultimately causes blindness. Dr. Fokas was relieved his patient came in when she did. Although some damage had already been done, he caught the condition in time to do something about it.

He referred to a specialist, who used a state-of-the-art laser technique to correct the leaking vessels. The patient also got a new prescription for new medications to help her condition.

Now, with her sight protected and diabetes closely monitored, Dr. Fokas' patient has a whole new outlook on the "little things." Says the doctor: "Each time I see her, she tells me how wonderful it is to still be able to read books and watch television at night!"

Thanks to several new treatments, people with diabetes can do more to protect their health — from their eye health or elsewhere in their bodies. While the eye treatments have complex medical names, they are helping more people preserve and enjoy the seemingly simple gift of sight.

### Some cutting edge tactics against retinopathy

- **Laser photocoagulation:** These laser treatments can help seal off leaky retinal blood vessels and stop new ones from forming.
- **Vitrectomy:** A surgical technique that removes blood between the lens and retina, often restoring lost vision.
- **Intraocular steroids:** Sounds scary, but these are injected right into the eye, and they reduce swelling and inflamed tissue for many patients.

### Saving sight: Dr. Fokas' view

Anastasios Fokas is among a nation of doctors worried about diabetes — now considered a "national epidemic."

"I see patients all the time who aren't managing their disease well, and that's just tragic," says Dr. Fokas. "Their vision could have been saved, if only they'd managed their illness better."

Managing diabetes well means a number of things. There's weight management, exercise and controlling blood sugar. And, it means an eye exam — every year, so your doctor can catch any signs of diabetic retinopathy in time to help.