

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

FACT SHEET

What is diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetes and its complications can greatly affect many parts of the eye. A common complication of diabetes is diabetic retinopathy in which elevated blood sugar damages the delicate blood vessels inside the eye, causing them to leak, bleed and become blocked. Diabetic retinopathy can seriously affect vision and lead to permanent vision loss and blindness if left untreated, and is the leading cause of blindness in adults 20 to 70 years old.

Because diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness, early diagnosis and treatment is essential. This is one reason why it is important to have your eyes examined regularly by your doctor of optometry, especially if you have diabetes or you are at risk for development of the disease. Besides diabetic retinopathy, other eye conditions associated with diabetes include fluctuations in vision, double vision, cataracts and glaucoma.

During a comprehensive eye examination, your doctor of optometry will get to know you, your medical history, your family history, your lifestyle and your vision needs.

To detect diabetic retinopathy, your doctor of optometry can look inside your eyes with lights and lenses that magnify the view of the retina. The interior of your eyes may also be photographed to provide documentation of your retina appearance and watch for changes over time.

What is the risk?

The beginning stages of diabetic retinopathy may cause blurred vision, or no visual symptoms at all. Diabetic retinopathy symptoms mainly depend on where the blood vessel changes are taking place in your eye's retina. As diabetic retinopathy

progresses, you may notice a cloudiness in your vision, blind spots or floaters. This is usually caused by blood leaking from abnormal new vessels that block light from reaching the retina.

In advanced stages, connective scar tissue forms in association with new blood vessel growth, causing additional distortion and blurriness. Over time, this tissue can shrink and detach the retina.

How is diabetic retinopathy treated?

Once diabetic retinopathy has been diagnosed by your doctor of optometry, your eyes will be examined more frequently for diabetic changes. At certain stages of diabetic retinopathy, laser and other surgical treatments can be used to reduce the progression of the disease and decrease the risk of vision loss. Ask your doctor of optometry about the types of treatment available and those best suited for you.

If you experience vision loss due to diabetic retinopathy, that cannot be improved with regular eyeglasses, your doctor of optometry may prescribe special low vision aids to help



Above: normal vision.

Below: a scene as it might be viewed by a person with diabetic retinopathy.



maximize your current vision. Some of the optical aids available include telescopic lenses for distance vision, microscopic lenses, magnifying glasses and electronic magnifiers for close work.

Can diabetic retinopathy be prevented?

Not every patient with diabetes develops retinopathy, but the chances of developing it increase after having diabetes for several years. Maintaining blood sugar levels targeted by your doctor will help delay retinal changes.

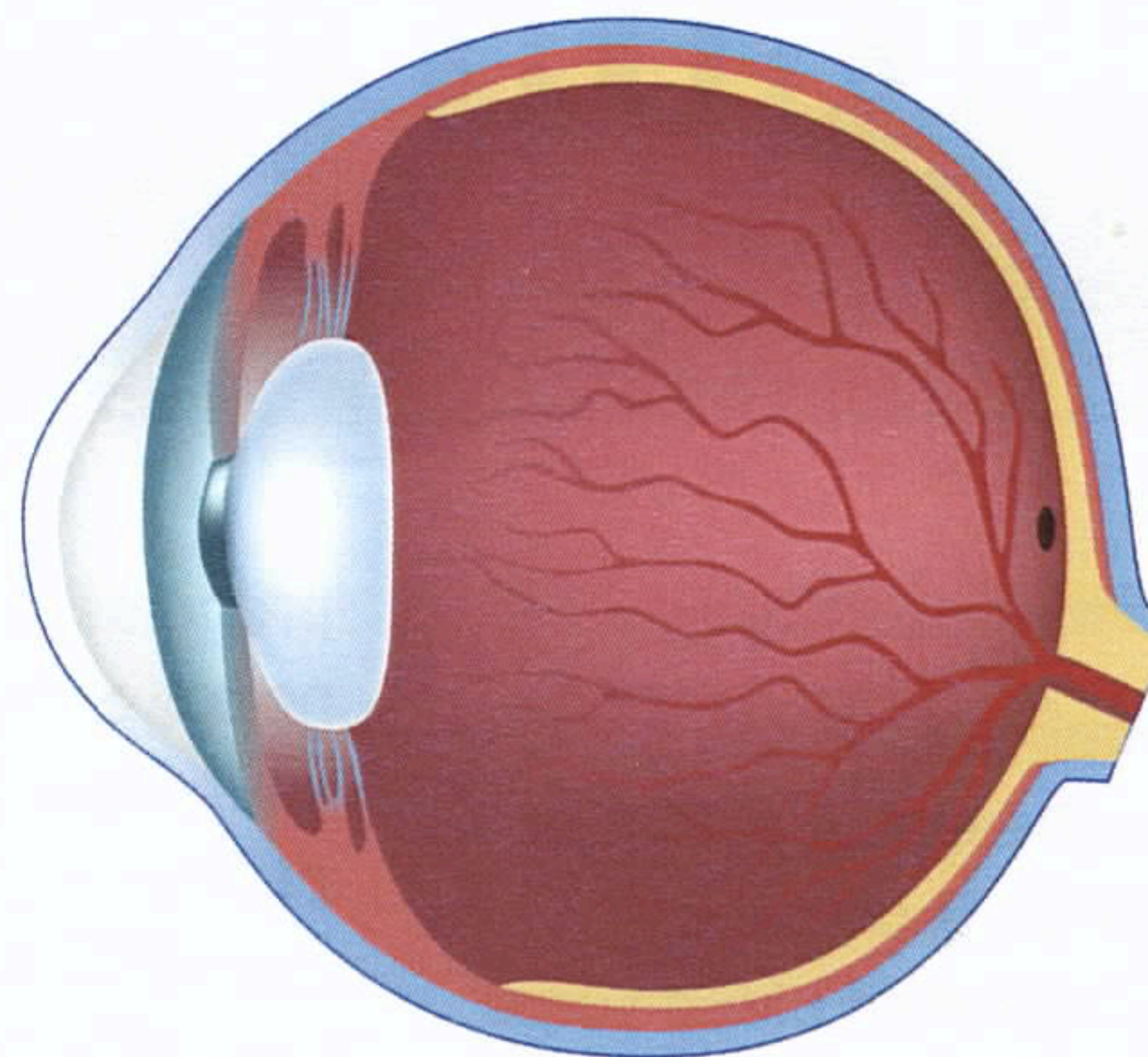
Evidence also suggests that factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and pregnancy may cause diabetic retinopathy to develop or worsen.

If you are a person with diabetes, or someone at risk for developing the disease, it is important that you take steps to help prevent the development of diabetic retinopathy, including:

- Take your prescribed medication as instructed
- Follow a proper diet
- Exercise regularly
- Have your eyes examined by a doctor of optometry.

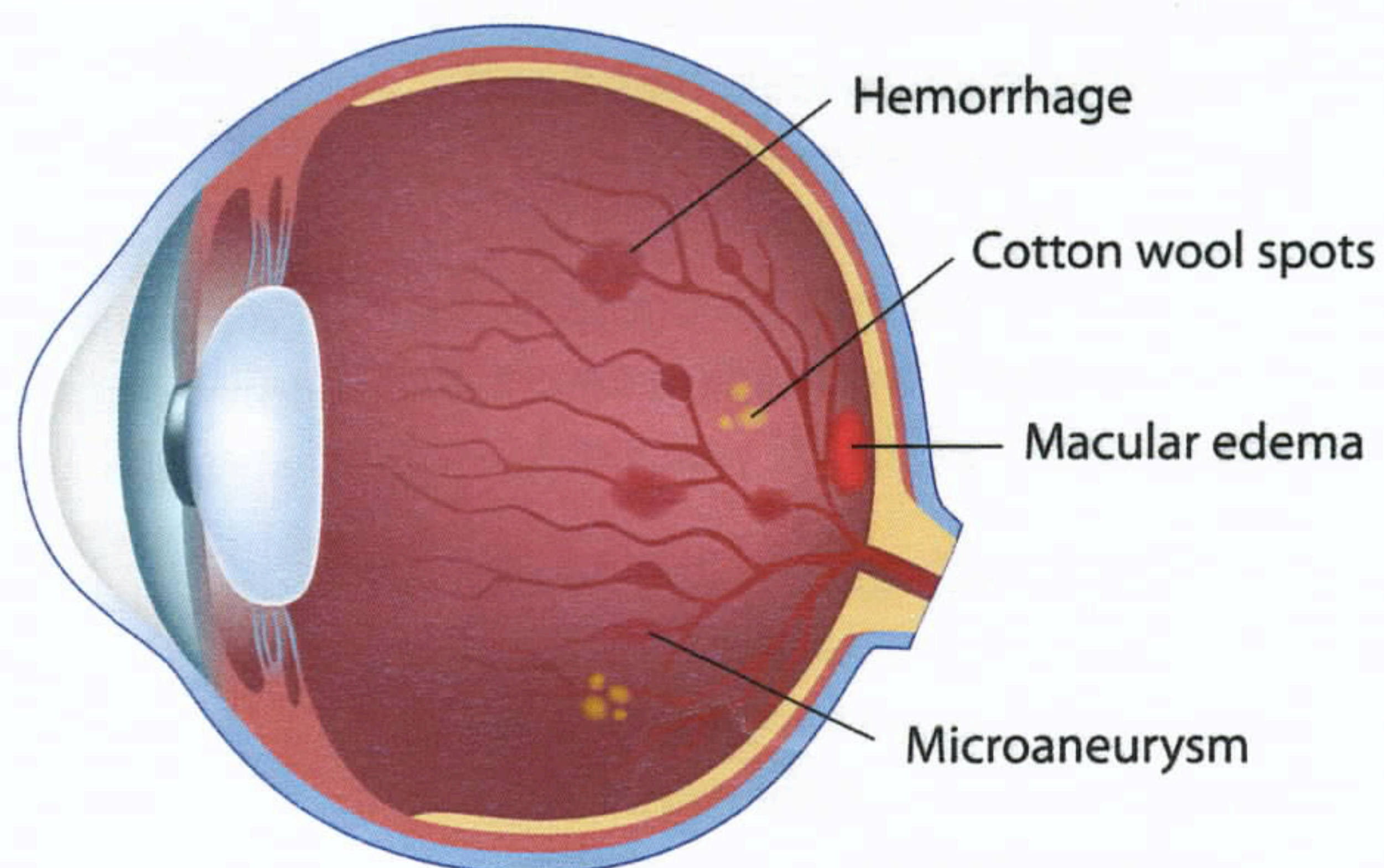
By doing so, chances are good that you can enjoy a lifetime of good vision and health.

Normal

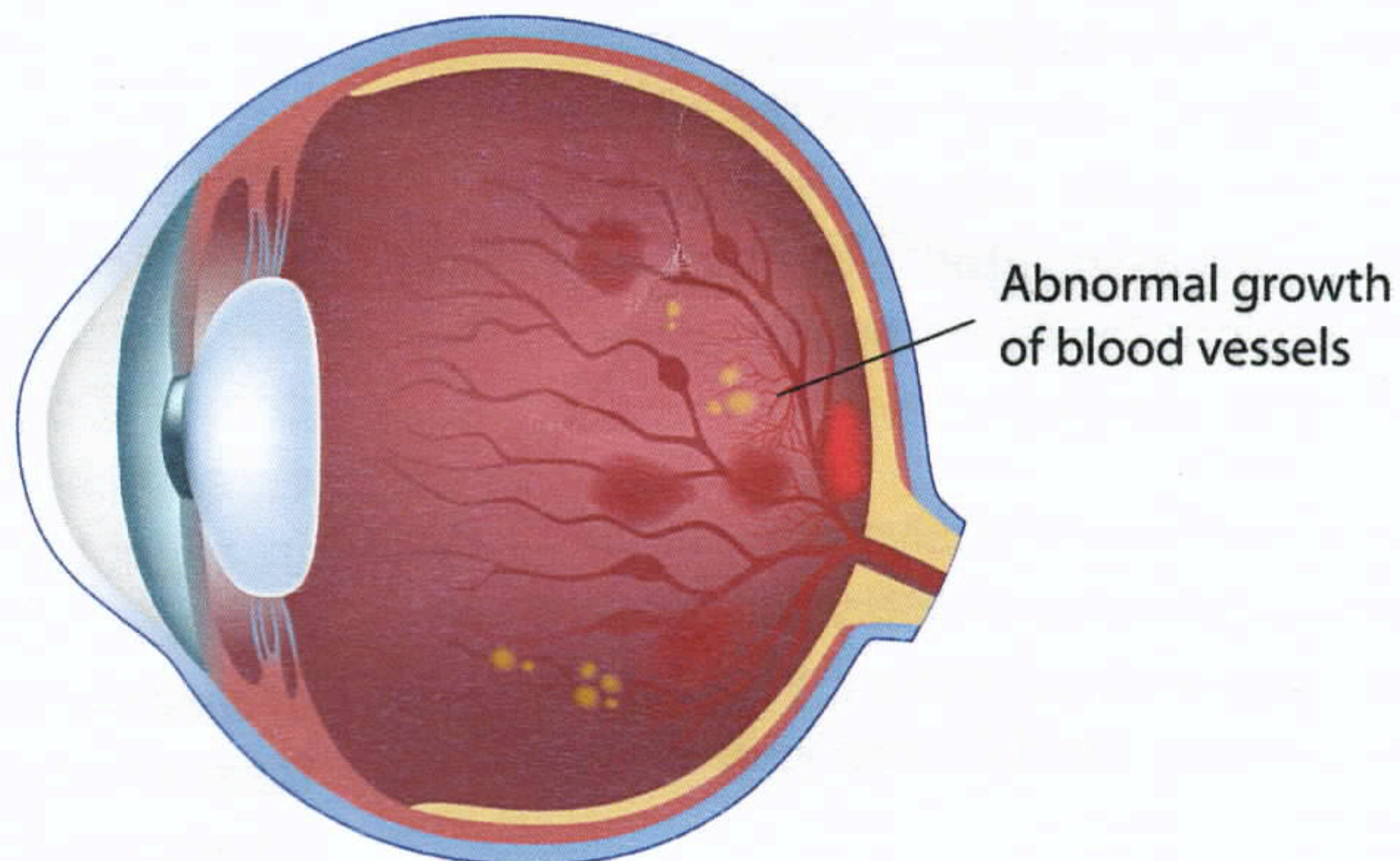


Diabetic Retinopathy

Nonproliferative Retinopathy



Proliferative Retinopathy



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