

# Diabetes



How it affects your eyes.



# Eye Care For You

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## **What you need to know:**

Approximately 16 million Americans have diabetes and half of these are at risk of vision loss because they are unaware that they are diabetic. Diabetic eye diseases, include diabetic retinopathy, cataracts and glaucoma. The most common of these is diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy is a potentially vision threatening condition in which the blood vessels inside the retina become damaged by high blood sugar levels.

Diabetes can also affect your vision by causing cataracts and glaucoma. As a diabetic you are likely to get cataracts at a younger age and your chances of developing glaucoma are doubled.

Because there are often no symptoms in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy, vision may not be affected until the disease becomes severe. You should see your Ophthalmologist soon after your Diabetes is diagnosed, and then promptly if you experience visual changes that:

- Affect only one eye.
- Lasts for more than a few days.
- Are not associated with a change in blood sugar.

More than one third of those diagnosed with diabetes don't get recommended vision care and may be more at risk for blindness. Once diagnosed with diabetes, schedule a complete dilated eye examination with your Ophthalmologist at least once a year.

Early diagnosis of diabetes and the effective control of blood sugar levels and hypertension through diet and exercise can help control eye diseases associated with diabetes..

## Important things to remember:

### **1. People with diabetes can protect their vision by having a dilated eye exam every year.**

Diabetic eye problems are amongst the most common complications facing people with diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy blinds 8000 Americans each year and is the leading cause of blindness among working age Americans. Your risk of developing diabetic retinopathy increases with the number of years you have had diabetes. After 15 years with the disease almost 80% of people with type I diabetes have some form of diabetic eye disease. Diabetes can also affect your vision by causing cataracts and glaucoma.

### **2. Yearly dilated eye exams can lead to early detection of eye disease.**

Early detection and treatment of diabetic retinopathy can usually prevent permanent vision loss. Pregnant women with diabetes should have an eye exam in the first trimester because diabetic eye disease can progress rapidly during pregnancy. Call your Ophthalmologist if you have diabetes and you notice vision changes that affect only one eye, last more than a few days or are not associated with changes in blood sugar level.

### **3. Keeping your blood sugar under control decreases your risk of many complications associated with diabetes including eye disease.**

High blood sugar can damage the blood vessels in the retina, which can lead to vision damage from diabetic retinopathy. Rapid changes in blood sugar can cause temporary changes in vision even if diabetic eye disease isn't present. It is especially important to keep blood sugar in good control for a few days before being examined for glasses because your blood sugar levels can affect your vision and you may end up with corrected lenses that don't work for you later. Good control of your blood sugar can help ensure you get the right prescription.

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