

Managing your vision while managing your diabetes

If you're one of the more than 29 million Americans with diabetes,[1] you know how important it is to take good care of yourself—monitoring your blood sugar, watching your diet, taking your medication, exercising. But if you haven't yet added an annual eye exam to your routine, you should.

Diabetics are at greater risk for eye problems. In fact, diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in adults ages 20-74.[2] However, proper eye care can lead to the early detection and early treatment of vision-related complications, including:

- **Glaucoma** – If you have diabetes, you are 40 percent more likely to develop glaucoma, according to the American Diabetes Association. Glaucoma occurs when increased fluid pressure in the eyes damages the nerve fibers in the optic nerve. While glaucoma can lead to irreversible vision loss, its progression can be slowed if it's detected and treated early.
- **Cataracts** – A cataract clouds the eye's lens, which blocks the passage of light. The condition is typically associated with aging, but the American Diabetes Association says diabetics are 60 percent more likely to develop cataracts. Regular eye exams can help identify and lead to the treatment of cataracts before they affect your quality of life.
- **Diabetic Retinopathy** – The leading cause of blindness among adults,[3] retinopathy is the most common eye complication in diabetic patients, affecting more than 4.4 million Americans age 40 and older.[4] Because its initial symptoms are very slight or even unnoticeable, diabetic retinopathy often goes undiagnosed. However, it can be detected during an annual comprehensive eye exam. Once detected, it can be treated by laser surgery.

Annual, comprehensive eye exams should be an important part of your diabetic care. These exams can help detect changes in your vision early on, enabling prompt referral and treatment that can lessen the risk of vision loss. In addition, be sure to see your eye care provider if you notice any of the following changes to your vision:

- Blurry, double or cloudy vision
- Pain or pressure in one or both eyes
- Trouble with peripheral vision
- Floating or flashing lights
- Dark spots

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Living with diabetes means looking out for your health. When you take care of yourself, you can look forward to better disease management and minimizing vision complications.

[1]Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2014.

[2]American Optometric Association, http://www.aoa.org/x6814.xml.

[3]NIH MedlinePlus, "Leading Causes of Blindness," http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/summer08/articles/summer08pg14-15.html.

[4]National Eye Institute, Prevent Blindness America®.

PDF-1706-R-407

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