



Live Right, Save Sight!

A healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of vision loss from diabetes

FACTS ABOUT DIABETES AND YOUR EYES

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More than 25 million children and adults in the United States have diabetes. Anyone with diabetes is at risk for diabetic eye disease. Diabetic eye disease can include diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, and glaucoma.

In fact, diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among adults aged 20–74 years.

The longer someone has diabetes, the greater the chance of developing diabetic eye disease. Over time, the disease can cause severe vision loss or blindness.

If you have diabetes, you can take three important steps to prevent vision loss from diabetic eye disease:

1. Watch and control your blood sugar levels
2. Take care of yourself
3. See an eye doctor at least once a year

WATCH AND CONTROL YOUR BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

Poor blood sugar control is one of the strongest causes of diabetic eye disease. If you have diabetes, you must watch and control your blood sugar levels carefully. You can do this with a healthy diet, insulin and other drugs.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Eating healthy and staying active are important for good health. High blood pressure, high blood fat levels and smoking also increase your risk of diabetic eye disease. Quitting smoking and living healthy can reduce these risks.

Talk to your family doctor before starting an exercise program. If you have diabetes, see your doctor regularly to control the disease.

Race and family history are also important risk factors. People who are Hispanic, African-American, Asian American, Pacific Islander and Native American descent are more likely to develop diabetes. Find out if any family members have diabetes and diabetic eye disease.

SEE AN EYE DOCTOR AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR

Early treatment of retinopathy can improve the chance for saving your sight. For some people, diabetic retinopathy may be one of the first signs that they have diabetes. Adults and children who have diabetes should have a dilated eye exam at least once a year.

If you have diabetic retinopathy, you may need to visit an eye doctor more often than once a year. This helps the doctor monitor the disease and



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determine the best treatment options. The eye doctor can decide if you need an eye exam more often.

At a complete eye exam, called a dilated eye exam, the eye doctor widens the pupil of the eye with eye drops to allow a closer look at the inside of the eye. This exam may not be part of an eye exam for a new pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses.

Be sure to ask your eye doctor for a dilated eye exam.

HOW CAN DIABETIC RETINOPATHY HURT MY EYES

Diabetic retinopathy harms blood vessels in the retina (see diagram), in the back of the eye. Small blood vessels in the retina become weak. They break down, leak and bleed. Unhealthy new blood vessels may start to grow.

Weak blood vessels may leak fluid and cause swelling. This is called macular edema and can distort your vision.

When unhealthy new blood vessels grow, they can bleed into the clear, jelly-like fluid, called vitreous, that fills most of the eyeball. This causes dark spots, strands that look like cobwebs, or clouding in your vision.

Scars from healing blood vessels sometimes pull the retina away from the back of the eye. The

retina can then tear or become detached. This can result in serious vision loss or even blindness.

HOW IS DIABETIC RETINOPATHY TREATED?

Laser treatments: A doctor may use a laser to seal leaking or bleeding vessels. This treatment is called photocoagulation.

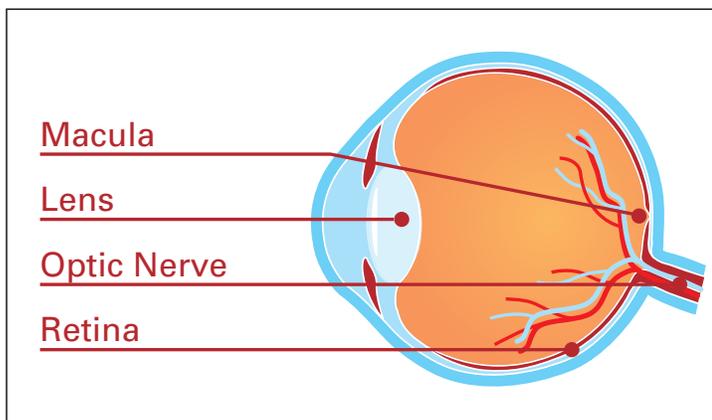
Vitrectomy: In this treatment, a doctor uses a small suction tool to take out the vitreous jelly of your eye. This operation removes blood and scar tissue in the vitreous as well. The doctor uses fluid to replace the vitreous.

Drug therapy: There are different types of medications that are currently being researched that may be effective. Talk to your eye doctor about what options are right for you.

Low vision aids: Some people lose so much sight to diabetic retinopathy that it becomes hard to do day-to-day tasks. Special training, called vision rehabilitation, can give you skills for living with vision loss. Low vision aids are tools that can help you if you have vision loss.

WE CAN HELP YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT LIVE RIGHT, SAVE SIGHT!

If you have questions about diabetic eye disease, call Prevent Blindness America at 800.331.2020 or visit our website, preventblindness.org/diabetes.



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