

Diabetes and Your Eyes



How can diabetes affect my eyes?

The high blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood sugar that are associated with diabetes can all damage the eye. Diabetes can damage many parts of the eye. One of the parts of the eye that can be damaged by diabetes is the retina. The retina is the back of the eye. When the retina becomes damaged during diabetes, it is called diabetic retinopathy. Retinopathy is the most common eye problem that can happen when a person has diabetes. When a person has diabetic retinopathy they can suffer from loss of sight. The number one cause of blindness in the United States is diabetic retinopathy.

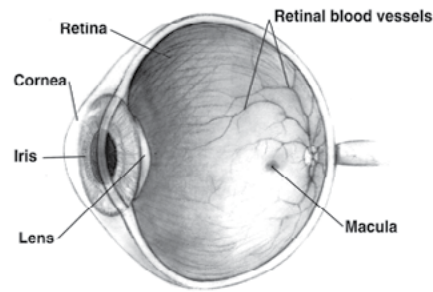


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How does diabetic retinopathy happen?

The retinas have very small blood vessels in them. These blood vessels can become damaged when a person has high blood sugar, high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol. This damage happens slowly over time.

When these blood vessels become damaged, they stop letting blood through. The body then starts to build new blood vessels in the retina. The new blood vessels are weak and leak blood. The broken blood vessels can also leave scar tissue. Both the leaking blood and the scar tissue can cause problems with vision.



What steps can I take to protect my eyes?

There are many things that can be done to help protect the eyes of a person with diabetes. These things are:

- Keep your blood pressure controlled. Not everyone's blood pressure goal is the same; ask your provider what your BP should be.
My blood pressure goal is: _____
My blood pressure today was: _____
- Keep your blood glucose under control. My A1c goal is: _____
My last A1c was: _____
- Keep your cholesterol at target.
My LDL cholesterol goal is: _____
My last LDL cholesterol was: _____
- Get a dilated eye exam every year, even if your vision is OK. A dilated eye exam can detect damage to the eye before there are any signs or symptoms. If there are problems with the blood vessels in the retina, a doctor can use a laser to stop further damage, and prevent vision loss. If your eyes do not get dilated during your eye exam, you did not get a full exam.
- If you are planning to get pregnant, ask your provider when to schedule your dilated eye exam. Every pregnant woman with diabetes should have a dilated eye exam.
- If you are pregnant, ask your provider about having a dilated eye exam during the first three months of pregnancy.
- Try to be physically active most days. Work your way up to 30 minutes of physical activity or more each day.
- Avoid tobacco. If you use tobacco, ask your provider or diabetes educator what resources are available for stopping.



How will I know if I have diabetic retinopathy?

It is very important to know that diabetic retinopathy often has NO SYMPTOMS. Symptoms you may notice are:

- Floating spots
- Blurry vision
- Double vision
- Trouble seeing out of the corners of your eyes
- Flashes
- No symptoms

What can be done if I have retina damage?

If your dilated eye exam finds that you have leaking blood vessels you may need a laser treatment to stop further damage and prevent diabetes blindness. If a lot of blood has already leaked into the eye, there is a surgery that might be recommended to help remove some of the blood.

If you have vision damage, ask your eye care provider about services for people with vision problems. Alaska has an organization that provides services for people with limited or no vision.

What other eye problems can a person with diabetes get?

People with diabetes are more likely to develop cataracts and glaucoma than people without diabetes. They are also more likely to develop these problems at a younger age. A cataract is a cloudy lens over the eye. The cloudy lens makes seeing difficult. Glaucoma is caused when pressure in your eye builds up and damages the optic nerve. The optic nerve is the main nerve to the eye. Both cataracts and glaucoma are treatable.

More Information

For more information or if you have questions, contact:

Diabetes Educator: _____

Phone: _____



Diabetes Program

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