

Eye Health and Diabetes

Eye disease is a common complication of diabetes, which can lead to blindness. If you have diabetes, you are at increased risk of developing eye disease. However, there are measures you can take to help keep your eyes healthy.

Reduce your risk of eye disease

Undergoing eye exams every year is very important for people with diabetes. Eye exams give you an indication of how diabetes is affecting your overall health. Controlling blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol will also help prevent or delay the development of eye disease. Be sure to:

- Work with your family doctor to control your blood sugars, blood pressure and cholesterol
- Avoid smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight through diet and exercise
- Have an eye exam with an optometrist or ophthalmologist every year.

Eye disease caused by diabetes

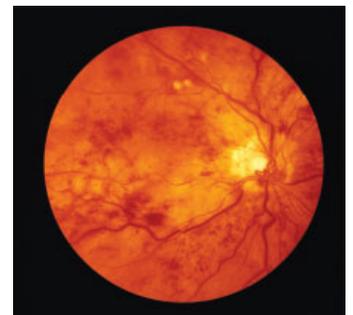
In North America, eye disease due to diabetes is the leading cause of preventable blindness in people between 30 to 69 years of age. Diabetes can cause damage to the blood vessels in the retina, the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. Rapid changes in blood sugar levels can also cause sugar to leak into the lens of the eye, causing swelling and blurred vision.

Eye Exam Facts

- In Ontario, the cost of eye examinations by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist for people with diabetes is covered through OHIP, regardless of age.
- You can see an optometrist without a referral.
- People with diabetes should have an eye exam every year, or as recommended by an eye doctor.



Normal eye



Severe eye disease due to diabetes



Eye Health and Diabetes

Early eye damage can occur without pain, redness or blurred vision. Therefore, people with diabetes need to have their eyes examined regularly by an optometrist or ophthalmologist to ensure changes are detected early. When caught early, eye disease can be treated with medications or laser surgery to prevent further permanent damage. If left untreated, the disease can lead to blindness.

What can you expect from your screening eye examination?

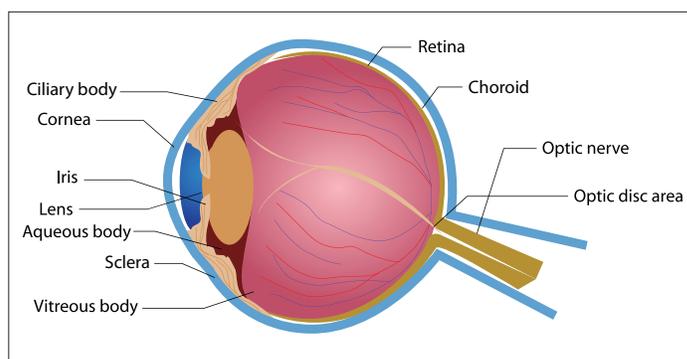
With regular eye examinations, your optometrist or ophthalmologist can diagnose diabetic eye disease at an early stage. Treatment at this stage can often prevent vision loss. Looking at the blood vessels in the eye also gives an indication of how diabetes is affecting other parts of the body. During the exam, your optometrist or ophthalmologist will assess your overall eye health, including a detailed look at the inside of your eye. Changes inside the retina can offer an early warning sign of damage to the heart, kidneys, and elsewhere in the body.

Your optometrist or ophthalmologist will dilate your pupils with eye drops to get a good look at the back of your eye. Dilation can cause blurry vision for several hours, so someone should be available to drive you home from your exam.

In Ontario, the cost of eye examinations by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist for people with diabetes is covered through OHIP, regardless of age. You do not need a referral to see an optometrist for an eye exam. Your eye care provider, either an optometrist or ophthalmologist, will usually report to your family doctor on the health of your eyes.

Optometrists and Ophthalmologists – What's the difference?

Most people with diabetes can be monitored by either an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. Ophthalmologists are medical doctors who specialize in the diagnosis, medical and surgical treatment of all types of eye disorders. Optometrists are primary eye care doctors who perform comprehensive eye exams, diagnose and medically treat common eye disease and disorders. People who are monitored by an optometrist are referred to an ophthalmologist once the eye disease becomes severe enough that it requires treatment.



The human eye

*Developed in collaboration with
the Eye Health Council of Ontario.*