

Frequently Asked Questions: **Diabetes and Eye Health**

Read these FAQs to better understand the connection between diabetes and eye health.

Q: How does diabetes affect vision?

- Diabetes occurs when your body cannot make insulin, does not make enough insulin, or cannot use insulin properly. The body breaks down the carbohydrates you eat into glucose that it uses for energy—and insulin is a hormone that the body needs to get glucose from the bloodstream into the cells of the body.
- When your blood sugar (blood glucose) levels are above target range, over time, elevated blood glucose can lead to diabetic eye disease. Diabetes affects your blood vessels, including the blood vessels in your eyes, and as the blood vessels in the back of your eye are weakened, they can start to leak, resulting in blurry or cloudy vision, which is called diabetic retinopathy. Diabetic eye disease affects your ability to see and can cause vision loss.
- The reality is diabetes is the leading cause of vision loss in people 18-64 years old—and there are often no obvious signs or symptoms. But the great news is an annual routine eye exam could prevent 95% of vision loss caused by diabetes.

Q: How is diabetic eye disease detected?

- Diabetic eye disease is detected through a comprehensive eye exam with dilation. It is the only way to find signs of eye disease early on—especially important since early intervention for eye disease results in better prognosis.

Q: How is diabetic eye disease treated?

- Taking steps to manage blood sugar levels and control blood pressure helps to slow the progression of diabetic eye disease.
- Treatment depends on the eye condition, and options may include eye injections, eyedrops, laser treatment, or surgery.



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Q: Who is at risk of developing diabetic eye disease?

- Anyone with diabetes (type 1, type 2, and gestational) is at risk of developing diabetic eye disease.
- The longer you have diabetes and the less you manage your blood sugar levels, the more likely you are to develop eye complications.
- People living with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or smoke tobacco are found to have an increased risk of developing diabetic eye disease.

Q: What are the symptoms of diabetic eye disease?

- There may not always be symptoms, making an annual dilated eye exam even more important.
- Symptoms may include blurred or distorted vision, flashes of light, floaters (seeing small spots “floating” in your field of vision), impaired colors, or vision loss.
- Talk to your eye doctor if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.



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Q: How is diabetic eye disease prevented?

- Receive an annual dilated eye exam to allow your eye doctor to monitor the health of your eyes and begin treatment if signs of complications appear. If diabetic eye disease is diagnosed quickly, treatment is easier and more likely to be effective.
- Manage your blood sugar to help prevent damage to the eye's blood vessels.
- Work with your diabetes care team to manage both your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and reach your targets.
- If you smoke, get help to quit.
- Exercise regularly to help manage your diabetes and eye health.

Contact your eye doctor today to schedule your comprehensive eye exam. To learn more about eye health and find an eye care provider near you, visit eyehealth.diabetes.org.

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