



Vision

# Did you know that diabetes can affect your eyes?



When you have diabetes it's important to exercise, watch what you eat, and check your blood sugar levels. But did you know you also need to see an eye doctor to have your vision checked?

Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in adults ages 20-74.<sup>1</sup> Be sure to get regular eye exams and tell your eye doctor you have diabetes. This is the best way to find any problems and keep your eyes healthy. Diabetes can lead to several eye problems including:

**Cataracts** – A clouding of the lens of the eye that makes it hard for people to see. This problem is usually connected to aging but diabetes increases the chance of cataracts by 60 percent. Your eye doctor can work with you on a treatment plan before your quality of life is changed.

**Glaucoma** – With diabetes, the chance of glaucoma goes up by 40 percent. Glaucoma is caused by increased pressure in the eye which damages the part of the eye that sends information from your eye to your brain. If untreated, it can cause blindness. Early treatment can slow this illness and save your vision.

**Diabetic Retinopathy** – This is the most common eye problem for people with diabetes. It causes blood vessels to leak or grow abnormally in the retina (the part of the eye that sees light). Without healthy blood vessels, the retina will be damaged and vision is lost. Diabetic retinopathy affects more than 4.4 million Americans age 40 and older<sup>2</sup> and is the leading cause of blindness among adults.<sup>3</sup> Diabetic retinopathy is often not noticed because you may not have early symptoms. Your eye doctor can see it during a comprehensive dilated eye exam. Once found, it often can be treated.

**Dry Eyes** – Burning, itchy, red eyes can be caused by dry eyes, and you may make less tears with diabetes. Dry eyes can make you feel uncomfortable, blur your vision and also lead to eye infections like pink eye. Your eye doctor can help you with options to keep your eyes healthy.

It is important for you and your eye doctor to find changes in your eyes early to protect your vision.

## Ways to prevent or manage diabetic eye problems

- Have a dilated eye exam at least once each year
- Discuss all vision changes with your eye doctor
- Follow your diabetic diet and exercise plan. Better control of blood sugar slows the onset and progression of diabetic retinopathy
- Take your medicine and check your blood sugar regularly
- Stop smoking — smoking is associated with diabetic retinopathy



Living with diabetes means playing an active role in your health. Taking your medicine, watching what you eat and exercising are all a part of this. **Check your blood sugar levels and following your doctor's advice to stay on track.** Regular vision care will help make sure that you have a lifetime of healthy vision.



<sup>1</sup>. American Optometric Association, <http://www.aoa.org/x6814.xml>.

<sup>2</sup>. National Eye Institute, "Facts About Diabetic Retinopathy," October 2009.

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

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