

Eye Health: **Common Diabetes-Related Eye Diseases**

If you are living with or at risk for diabetes, a yearly dilated and comprehensive eye exam or retinal photography can help you find out about diabetes-related eye disease. Learning about diabetes-related eye disease early will help you take steps to prevent vision loss. The longer you have diabetes, the more likely you are to develop eye complications.

An eye exam lets your eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) see your entire retina. Early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care with your eye doctor can reduce your risk for severe vision loss from diabetes-related eye disease.

Common diabetes-related eye diseases include:

Diabetes-Related Retinopathy

Diabetes-related retinopathy is a general term for damage in the retina caused by diabetes. Symptoms may not always appear, but common ones include:

- Floaters (seeing small spots “floating” in your vision)
- Blurred vision
- Distorted vision
- Impaired colors
- Empty areas in your vision
- Vision loss

Treatment

Your health care team will help you decide if changes to your diabetes treatment plan will help you meet your health targets. If diabetes-related retinopathy is mild or moderate, managing your blood glucose can often slow its progression. Other treatment options include eye injections, laser treatment, or surgery.

High blood glucose (blood sugar) levels can damage blood vessels in your retina (a thin layer of tissue lining the back of the eye). This can lead to a blockage of the blood vessels that nourish the retina. As your eye tries to grow new blood vessels, they do not properly develop—and as a result— may swell and leak fluid.

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Diabetes-Related Macular Edema

Diabetes-related macular edema occurs when the tiny blood vessels in the retina leak fluid into the macula, which is where focusing occurs. As the macula swells with fluid, vision blurs and colors may appear washed out.

Treatment

Your health care team will help you decide if changes to your diabetes treatment plan will help you meet your health targets. Other treatment options include eye injections, laser treatment, or surgery.

Cataracts

We are all born with a clear lens in our eyes. A cataract causes the lens in your eye to become cloudy. Most cataracts are associated with normal changes in your eyes as you age. You may experience cloudy or blurry vision, faded colors, halos around lights, difficulty seeing at night, or double vision. Cataracts are more common and develop earlier in people with diabetes.

Treatment

Cataract surgery is needed to remove the clouded lens and replace it with a new artificial lens.

Glaucoma

People living with diabetes are at higher risk of developing glaucoma. Glaucoma occurs when pressure builds up in the eye.

This pressure pinches the blood vessels to the retina and optic nerve, damaging both and resulting in permanent vision loss. You may experience, headaches, eye pain, watery or red eyes, halos, or blurred vision.

Treatment

Your health care team will help you decide if changes to your diabetes treatment plan will help you meet your health targets. Other treatment options include eye injections, laser treatment, or surgery.



To learn more about eye health and find an eye doctor near you, visit diabetes.org/eye-health-access.

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