

Eye Health: Dilated Eye Exam

For those living with or at risk for diabetes, a yearly dilated and comprehensive eye exam or retinal photography is a simple and non-invasive way to detect diabetes-related eye disease. As part of a dilated and comprehensive eye exam, pupil dilation allows your eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) to see your entire retina. Early detection, timely treatment, and follow-up care with an eye doctor can reduce your risk for severe vision loss from diabetes-related eye disease.

Getting your annual eye exam does not have to be stressful! Here are some tips on making the most of your visit.

You May Not Have Symptoms

Diabetes-related retinopathy (damage to the blood vessels in the retina) may not cause any noticeable symptoms. This is why yearly eye exams are so important for finding out if you have it early. The sooner you know, the sooner you can start taking steps to prevent or delay vision loss.

If you've noticed a change in your vision, don't wait until your next appointment. See your eye doctor right away and let them know about:

- Any symptoms or changes in your eyesight (floaters, blurred vision, flashing lights) and when they started
- What your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels are when symptoms occur
- Any changes to your treatment plan (like new medications or other health problems)
- Anything else you think may help

Understand Your Risk Factors

Along with high blood glucose, other factors will put you at higher risk of vision problems, including:

- How long you've had diabetes
- A1C results higher than your targets
- Nicotine use (including smoking or vaping)
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Cholesterol problems
- If you're pregnant
- Belonging to a high-risk group (Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian)

Know What to Expect at a Dilated and Comprehensive Eye Exam

If you are nervous about a doctor getting close to your eyes, do not worry. Your eye exam will be simple, and while it may be a little different from doctor to doctor, here's what you can expect most of the time:

- Your eye doctor will first check if there is a change in your eyeglass or contact lens prescription.
- To find signs of retinopathy, your eye doctor will put drops in your eyes to dilate your pupils. This will allow them look at your entire retina (the tissue at the back of the eye) in much greater detail and detect signs of damage. If damage is found, you can take steps to prevent or delay vision loss.
 - Since the dilation can last up to six hours, you may need to plan for another way to get home or bring someone with you to your appointment who can drive you. You are also likely to be more sensitive to light, so bring a pair of sunglasses to make your trip home more comfortable.
- Your eye doctor will also check for cataracts (clouding of the lens in the eye) and glaucoma (high pressure in the eye), which are also more common in people with diabetes.



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



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