

Eye Health: **What to Expect at Your Eye Exam**

There are different tests your eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) will perform during your dilated and comprehensive eye exam. The tests can take between one to three hours to complete. Note that you may have retinal photography instead of a dilated and comprehensive eye exam. If diabetes-related eye disease is found and requires treatment, this treatment is most often performed by a retina specialist.

Dilated and Comprehensive Eye Exam

Your dilated and comprehensive eye exam will look for signs of five diabetes-related complications that can lead to vision loss or blindness. These conditions may not have symptoms, so your eye exam will help you find out if you have them early. Starting to treat eye conditions as early as possible is key so you can take steps to protect your vision.

Your eye exam will include testing your vision acuity, measuring eye pressure, and imaging the eye (retinal photography or laser scans).

The most important part of your eye exam is the dilated exam of your retina, looking for the following five complications:

1. **Retinopathy:** Swelling and bleeding in the blood vessels of your eye's retina.
2. **Macular edema:** Swelling and fluid build-up in the macula of your eye, which can happen at the same time as retinopathy.
3. **Cataracts:** A clouding of the lens of your eye.
4. **Glaucoma:** Increased fluid pressure in your eyes.
5. **Dry eye:** Causes blurred vision that improves with blinking, and your eyes water to make up for the dryness. When it's severe, you'll feel stinging or burning in your eyes.

Let's take a closer look at specific tests of the eye exam and why they are important.

Visual Acuity Testing

The vision acuity test measures your vision in each eye and determines whether you need a prescription for glasses or contacts, or if your prescription needs to be updated.

Diabetes can potentially lead to sudden changes in your vision and your eyeglass or contact lens prescription. The visual acuity test will help catch these changes.

Eye Pressure/Tonometry

This test measures the pressure in your eye. The test is painless and you only need to sit still and open your eyes widely while your eye pressure is measured. If the pressure is high, it could mean you've developed glaucoma. Some people develop glaucoma even when the pressure is in the normal range. And some people never develop glaucoma even if the pressure is high.

Since glaucoma usually doesn't have symptoms until it's severe, this test is critical to finding out about it early. A 3D view of your optic nerves will also help to detect early damage from eye pressure.

Dilated Eye Exam

This is the best way to catch any signs of damage in your eyes, even in its earliest stages. It also lets your eye doctor understand of how much damage there is.

After giving you eye drops to dilate (enlarge) your pupils (the dark circle in the center of your iris), your eye doctor will be able to see the inside of your eyes. It will take about 15 to 30 minutes for your pupils to dilate. This will let as much light into your eye as possible and keep your pupils from getting smaller when light is shined in them for the exam. This makes it easier for your eye doctor to look for signs of retinopathy, macular edema, and optic nerve damage.

While your pupils are dilated, your vision may be blurry and you may be very sensitive to light for about two to four hours after the exam. Bringing sunglasses with you will help you with light sensitivity until the drops wear off. You may want to have a friend or family member drive you home.

Optical Coherence Tomography (OTC)/Photography

Your eye doctor may also use noninvasive imaging technology to scan your retina and the health of your optic nerve with a specialized light. Often photographs are also taken of each eye. These tests are important when diabetes-related eye disease is suspected or to see how your treatment is working.

These tests are used to check your retina, central macula, and optic nerve for almost every eye disease.

Your yearly dilated and comprehensive eye exam is the best way to find out about diabetes-related eye disease and take steps to protect your vision. Having eye problems you don't know about can lead to vision loss or blindness. Early detection and treatment is the key to keeping your eyes healthy for a lifetime.

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