

# Diabetes increases eye disease risk

Having high blood sugar can put a person's vision at risk, which makes regular vision exams especially important for people with diabetes.

Diabetes is a disease that occurs when blood sugar is too high. High blood sugar can damage the tiny blood vessels in the back of the eye. They weaken, bulge, and gradually leak, causing a condition known as diabetic retinopathy.

The damaged blood vessels are in the retina, which lines the back of the eye and is critical to clear vision. The retina is the part of the eye that senses light and sends signals to the brain that allow us to see.

If diabetic retinopathy worsens, some blood vessels in the retina become blocked. New vessels may grow, but they harm the eye instead of being helpful.

The new blood vessels are fragile and can leak blood and block vision. They can create scar tissue, which can lead to the retina becoming detached, causing serious vision problems.

Signs of diabetic retinopathy can include:

- Dark areas or vision loss
- Poor color vision
- Blurry or wavy vision
- Spots (floaters)
- Flashes of light

Diabetic retinopathy has no signs at first, which is why an eye exam is so important. When diabetic retinopathy is found and treated in the early stages, the risk of blindness is reduced by 95 percent.

A person with diabetes is also at risk for other eye diseases, including cataracts and glaucoma. Regular checkups can also help detect these conditions, which can be treated to save a person's vision.



Your Health and Wellness Awareness Program

## Fast Facts

**Fact:** More than 30 million Americans have diabetes.

**Fact:** Diabetic retinopathy is the most common cause of vision loss among people with diabetes.

**Fact:** Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of vision loss among working-age adults.



Normal vision



Diabetic retinopathy

Source: National Institutes of Health; National Eye Institute

## Tips for prevention

People with diabetes can keep their eyes healthy by:

- Managing blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol
- Taking medications as prescribed
- Staying physically active
- Quitting smoking
- Maintaining a healthy diet
- Getting a comprehensive eye exam once a year

## What's an eye made of?

The main parts of the eye are:

