

Diabetic Eye Disease

It is very important to have your eyes examined annually by eye-care specialists.

People with diabetes are at special risk for serious eye problems such as poor sight and blindness. In fact, diabetes is the major cause of blindness in working-aged adults. Most people (8 out of 10) who have had diabetes for more than 15 years have some eye damage. Many of the problems are preventable. Here is some basic information that you can use to keep your eyes healthy.

Take Care of Your Eyes

In many people, diabetic eye disease does not cause any changes in vision until the damage is very serious. To find eye disease before the damage is very serious and sight is lost, eyes must be examined by health care professionals.

Have your eyes checked by an eye-care specialist once a year. Don't wait for your vision to change – it could be too late. During the exam, your eyes should be dilated and the specialist should do a very thorough exam.

In addition to your annual eye-care specialist check-ups, your family doctor may also want to examine your eyes at office visits. If problems are found, you will be referred to an ophthalmologist (a doctor who is specially trained and licensed in eye care and surgery) for further examination and treatment.

Call your doctor right away if you have any eye problems or changes in vision, such as haziness, partially blocked sight, dark spots, flashing lights, or difficulty seeing at night.

Good blood sugar control can help prevent vision problems. Try to keep your blood sugars as close to normal as possible. Your physician can tell you what "normal" means for you.

Have your blood pressure checked often. If you have high blood pressure, find out what you can do about it. Always be sure to take blood pressure medication prescribed by your doctor.

Seek Treatment

If you have been diagnosed with diabetic eye disease, you will need to see an ophthalmologist for further care. In some cases, treatment is not necessary and you will be watched every year to make sure the disease does not worsen.

In other cases, serious vision loss and blindness can be prevented with the use of laser surgery. Laser surgery is done by ophthalmologists in offices or outpatient clinics. It does not require an incision or stitches.

Remember, laser surgery and other types of treatment work best when eye problems are found early. Thus, it is very important to have your eyes examined annually by eye-care specialists.



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