

Looking after your eyes

Looking after your eyes is important, especially when you have diabetes. With diabetes, you have an increased risk of developing eye problems, which, if left untreated, can lead to reduced vision or even blindness.

You can greatly reduce your risk of serious vision loss from diabetes through regular eye examinations and timely treatment. The sooner eye problems are detected and treated, the better the result.

Diabetes can cause both short-term and long-term eye problems.

Short-term eye problems

High blood glucose levels can cause a short-term blurring of vision. This is due to temporary changes in the shape of the lens of your eye. Blurred vision can occur at different times – before you are diagnosed with diabetes, when starting a new treatment for diabetes, or when blood glucose levels fluctuate. Talk to your doctor about this if you are concerned.

Long-term eye problems

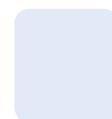
The risk of serious eye problems increases when you have high blood glucose levels over a long period of time, or if your blood pressure or cholesterol levels are high. Long-term eye problems include diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and cataracts.

Diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when, over time, high blood glucose levels damage the small blood vessels in the retina of the eye, causing them to leak fluid. New blood vessels grow to compensate for the ones that are damaged, but these new vessels are weak and easily rupture and bleed (haemorrhage). New blood vessels can also leak protein or fluid into the part of the eye called the macula, which gives us our central vision.

In the early stages, there may be no symptoms or changes to your vision, but an eye check can identify the onset of problems. As retinopathy progresses, the below symptoms can occur.

- » Blurred or distorted vision (that is not improved with prescription glasses)
- » Seeing floating spots or flashes
- » Sensitivity to light and glare
- » Difficulty seeing at night.



It's important for diabetic retinopathy to be diagnosed early, so it can be treated before it becomes more serious and affects your vision.

Glaucoma

Glaucoma occurs when there is damage to the optic nerve, causing a build-up of pressure inside the eye. It can affect anyone but it's more common in people with diabetes.

If it's not treated early, glaucoma can lead to loss of vision or blindness. There are no warning signs of glaucoma, but problems can be detected early with regular eye checks that include measuring eye pressure.

Cataracts

Cataracts occur when the lens in the eye becomes cloudy, which can reduce vision. Although sun damage and ageing are the main risk factors, people with diabetes tend to develop cataracts faster and at a younger age than others.

Eye checks

- » Have your eyes checked when you are first diagnosed with diabetes, and then on a regular basis – generally every two years – by an optometrist or an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) to look for early signs of damage.
- » Have your eyes checked more often if your eye care professional advises, especially if you already have eye problems or are planning a pregnancy.
- » Your eyes can be checked by an optometrist without the need for a medical referral. This is covered by Medicare.

- » Discuss any changes in your vision in between your routine eye checks with your optometrist, eye specialist or doctor.

Looking after your eyes

In most cases, the earlier eye problems are treated, the better the result. Your eye specialist can advise what treatments are available.

- » Aim for blood glucose levels and blood pressure as close to your target ranges as possible. Regular appointments with your health professionals can help you with this.
- » Keep your cholesterol level within the recommended range.
- » See your optometrist or ophthalmologist for an eye check as soon as you notice any changes in your vision.
- » Don't smoke. If you do smoke, try and quit. If you feel you can't give up smoking on your own, ask for help – talk to your doctor or call the Quitline on 137 848.
- » Speak to a psychologist or social worker if the health of your eyes is causing you to feel worried or anxious.



More information

For more information, visit
www.visionaustralia.org.au

The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.

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