



How diabetes affects your eyes

People with diabetes are at risk for developing certain eye disorders. The most common diabetes-related eye disorders are diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and cataracts.

Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is a general term for disorders of the retina caused by diabetes. The retina is the lining at the back of the eye that is important to your vision. Because damage to the retina happens slowly over many years, the longer you have had diabetes the more likely you are to have retinopathy.

In the early stages of diabetic retinopathy the tiny blood vessels that carry blood to the retina swell and weaken. Over time, the blood vessels may become clogged reducing the amount of blood getting to the retina. Eventually new but weaker blood vessels begin to grow; these new blood vessels break easily allowing blood to leak into the eye. The weak and damaged blood vessels can form scar tissue and pull the retina away from the back of the eye causing vision problems.

Symptoms of Diabetic Retinopathy

Often there are no symptoms in the early stages of diabetic retinopathy. It is even possible for your retina to become severely damaged before you notice any changes in your vision. It is important to get a diabetes eye exam at least once a year to check for retinal damage. However, if you have any of the following signs of retinal damage call your eye doctor right away.

- Blurry or double vision
- Floating spots
- Flashing lights, halos around objects, or blank spots
- Trouble seeing out of the corner of your eye

August 2016



Glaucoma and Cataracts

Glaucoma and cataracts are eye conditions that can affect anyone. However, people with diabetes are 40% more likely to get glaucoma and 60% more likely to develop cataracts than people without diabetes.

Glaucoma is caused by pressure building up in the eye. The pressure pinches the blood vessels that supply blood to the retina and optic nerve, causing damage to them. This damage causes gradual vision loss, usually affecting the sides of your eyes first. The risks of glaucoma increases the longer you have had diabetes, and as you get older.

Cataracts are clouds that form over the lens of your eye. This blocks light from entering the eye causing your vision to be blurry and colors to appear faded. Cataracts tend to get worse faster and at a younger age when you have diabetes.

Factors that increase your risk of diabetes-related eye problems

- Uncontrolled blood sugar levels
- High blood pressure
- How long you have had diabetes - the longer you have had diabetes the higher the risk of eye complications
- Family history

What can I do to prevent eye problems?

- See an eye doctor for a diabetes eye exam every year
- Keep your blood sugar levels as close to normal as possible
- Keep your blood pressure controlled
- Do not smoke

Get a diabetes eye exam every year even if you have no signs or symptoms of eye problems. Finding eye problems early and getting treatment right away are the best ways to prevent further damage.