

Early detection and treatment can prevent much of the vision loss caused by diabetes... See your family physician or nurse practitioner regularly and follow instructions about diet, exercise and medication.



Contact the Canadian Association of Optometrists to find an eye doctor in or near your community.

Call 1 888 263 4676  
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A vision and eye health message from the Vision Institute of Canada in partnership with:



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## Diabetes & Your Eyes

A clear vision for  
healthy living



# Diabetes & Your Eyes

## What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease that prevents your body from making or using insulin which in turn leads to increased sugar levels in your bloodstream.

## How does diabetes affect the eye?

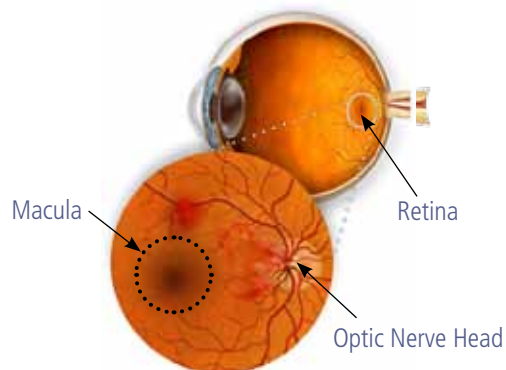
Diabetes and its complications can affect many parts of the eye. Diabetes can cause changes in nearsightedness, farsightedness and premature presbyopia (the inability to focus on close objects). It can result in cataracts, glaucoma, paralysis of the nerves that control the eye muscles or pupil, and in decreased corneal sensitivity. Visual symptoms of diabetes include fluctuating or blurring of vision, occasional double vision, loss of visual field, and flashes and floaters within the eyes. Sometimes these early signs of diabetes are detected in a thorough eye examination. The most serious eye problem associated with diabetes is diabetic retinopathy.

*People living with diabetes are 25 times more likely to become legally blind than people who do not have this disease.*



## What is retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when there is a weakening or swelling of the tiny blood vessels in the retina of your eye, resulting in blood leakage, the growth of new blood vessels and other changes. If diabetic retinopathy is left untreated, blindness can result.



## Can vision loss from diabetes be prevented?

People living with diabetes are 25 times more likely to become legally blind than people who do not have this disease. Fortunately, early detection and treatment can prevent much of the vision loss caused by diabetes. In a routine eye examination, your eye doctor can diagnose the vision threatening changes in your eye that can be treated to prevent blindness. However, once damage has occurred, the effects are usually permanent. It is important to control your diabetes as much as possible to minimize your risk of developing retinopathy.

## How is diabetic retinopathy treated?

In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy is monitored through eye health examinations. If necessary, it may be treated with laser therapy. A bright beam of light is focused on the retina, causing a burn which seals off leaking blood vessels. In other cases, surgery inside the eye may be necessary. Early detection of diabetic retinopathy is crucial, as treatment is much more likely to be successful at an early stage.

## Are there risk factors for developing diabetic retinopathy?

Several factors that increase the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy include smoking, poor nutrition, high blood pressure, drinking alcohol and pregnancy.

## How can diabetes-related eye problems be prevented?

Monitor and maintain control of your diabetes. See your family physician or nurse practitioner regularly and follow instructions about diet, exercise and medication. See an optometrist or ophthalmologist (your eye doctors) for a thorough eye examination when you are first diagnosed with diabetes, and annually thereafter and more frequently if recommended.