

Eye on Health

Keeping An Eye On Diabetes

(NAPSA)—It's estimated that one-third of the 17 million Americans who have diabetes don't realize they have it. Type 2 diabetes, which accounts for 90-95 percent of all cases of diabetes, can cause changes in vision and, in extreme cases, blindness.

Fortunately, having regular, comprehensive eye examinations performed by an optometrist can serve as the first line of detection of the disease.

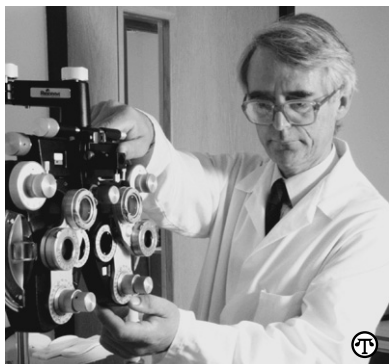
During a comprehensive eye examination, the optometrist examines how clearly one sees, checks for nearsightedness or farsightedness, the ability of both eyes to aim at the same object, ability of both eyes to maintain alignment on a moving object and ability of the lens of the eye to change shape to allow clear vision at all distances.

The optometrist also evaluates eye health by putting drops in the eyes so that the pupils become dilated. This allows the optometrist to actually see into the eyes through the pupils. When looking inside the eye at the retina, he or she can see the blood vessels directly.

The eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through skin or tissue. As a result, optometrists can detect many diseases that affect our blood vessels. Early detection of diabetes is critical in maintaining healthy vision.

In addition to older age, obesity, and physical inactivity, other diabetes risk factors include a family history of diabetes, medical history of gestational diabetes, impaired glucose tolerance and race/ethnicity.

Of the risk factors that can be controlled, experts offer these tips



Many people don't realize that a comprehensive eye exam by an optometrist can often detect conditions related to diabetes.

on reducing the risk of developing diabetes:

- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise regularly.
- Get high blood pressure under control. High blood pressure can make eye problems worse by increasing damage to blood vessels.
- Keep blood sugar levels under tight control. High blood sugar causes damage to blood vessels. For eyes, this can mean damage to blood vessels in the retina and quite possibly changes in fluid pressure and clouding of the lens.
- Quit smoking.
- See an optometrist if your vision becomes blurry, you have trouble reading signs or books, see double, feel pressure in your eyes, straight lines do not look straight or your side vision is limited.

Healthy vision doesn't happen by accident. Regular eye exams are essential in maintaining eye health, and can also contribute to good overall health.

For more information, please visit the American Optometric Association's Web site at www.aoa.org.