

EYECARE AMERICA

Regular Eye Exams are Essential to Living Your Best Life with Diabetes

(NAPS)—Many people don't know it but diabetes is a leading cause of vision loss. Fortunately, early detection could save your vision. Unfortunately, most people with diabetes do not get a yearly comprehensive eye exam as recommended by the American Academy of Ophthalmology.

Diabetic eye diseases often have no obvious signs or symptoms. The good news, however, is that an annual routine eye exam can help identify eye disease early so you can take steps to prevent or delay vision loss caused by diabetes.

"My patients are often surprised by how comfortable these eye exams are," said Andrew Iwach, MD, an ophthalmologist in San Francisco and a volunteer with EyeCare America, a program offering no-cost eye exams to qualified, underserved Americans. "Taking charge of your diabetes includes taking charge of your eye health. Most people say they rely on their vision more than any other sense, so don't wait until you notice symptoms. Get your eyes checked every year."

How Does Diabetes Affect Eyesight?

Diabetes affects the body's ability to produce or use insulin effectively to control blood sugar levels. High blood sugar levels can cause damage in many parts of the body, including the blood vessels in the eye. When this happens, the blood vessels can swell or leak, leading to vision loss. This is called diabetic retinopathy.

People with diabetes are also at higher risk of other eye diseases, including cataracts and glaucoma.

People with diabetes who don't have eye disease can also experience a change in their vision. A quick change in blood sugar levels can cause temporary blurry vision. Taking care of your overall health by keeping up with exams, medications, and dietary guidelines as your doctor recommends is key to protecting your good vision.

A Simple and Painless Way To Avoid Blindness

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that about 90 percent of vision loss from diabetes can be prevented if it is diagnosed early.



If you have diabetes, it's wise to have your eyes checked by an ophthalmologist to make sure they're not affected by the disease.

Routine eye exams can include reading an eye chart, shining a light into your eye to check your pupil, testing your eye movement and side vision, an eye pressure test, looking at your eye through a slit-lamp microscope, and using dilating eye drops to check on the health of your retina, which is the back of your eye. You may experience slight sensitivity to light after dilation, but otherwise, these exams are pain-free.

Getting a comprehensive eye exam before eye disease develops will not only give you peace of mind, but an ophthalmologist can also help you understand your risk factors and recommend health tips moving forward to help prevent disease.

Can't Afford an Eye Exam?

EyeCare America® Can Help

Unfortunately, many of the 37 million people living in the United States with diabetes don't have the time or the means to get an annual eye exam.

People of color are at a greater risk of going blind from diabetes. The number of people with diabetic retinopathy is predicted to increase by 48 percent by 2030.

Individuals who are at high risk for eye disease or are over the age of 65 may be eligible for a no out-of-pocket cost medical eye exam through the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeCare America® program. This public service program matches volunteer ophthalmologists with eligible patients in need of eye care across the United States. To see if you or a loved one qualifies, visit www.aao.org/eyecare-america/patients.