

Diabetes and Your Eyes





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Did you know that diabetes can affect your eyesight, even before you notice any changes? Diabetes doesn't just impact blood sugar levels — it can also damage the tiny blood vessels in your eyes. This can lead to a group of conditions known as *diabetic eye disease*, which is a leading cause of vision loss in adults. The good news is that with good blood sugar control and regular eye exams, most serious problems can be prevented or treated early.



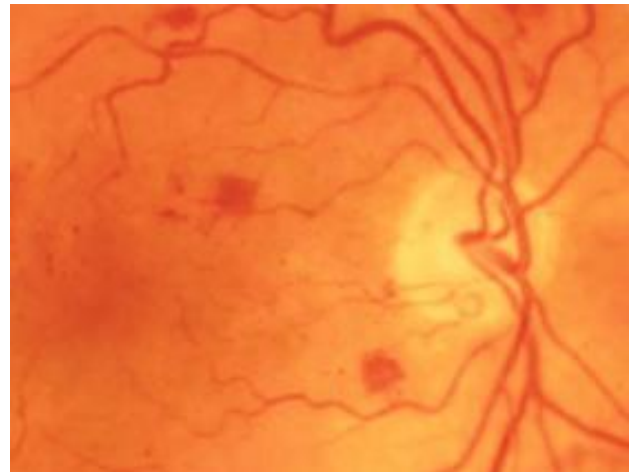
How Diabetes Affects the Eyes

Your eyes are full of small, delicate blood vessels that bring oxygen and nutrients to the retina — the light-sensitive tissue at the back of your eye. When blood sugar levels stay too high for too long, these vessels can become weak or leaky. Over time, this can damage the retina and affect your vision.

The main eye conditions linked to diabetes are:

Diabetic Retinopathy

This is the most common eye problem related to diabetes. High blood sugar damages the tiny blood vessels in the retina. In early stages, small leaks can cause swelling or bleeding. In later stages, new, fragile blood vessels may grow and cause scarring, which can lead to vision loss.



Diabetic Macular Edema (DME)

The macula is the central part of the retina responsible for detailed vision. Fluid leaking into this area can cause the macula to swell, leading to blurred or distorted vision.

Cataracts

People with diabetes are more likely to develop cataracts at a younger age. High blood sugar can cause the lens inside the eye to become cloudy.

Glaucoma

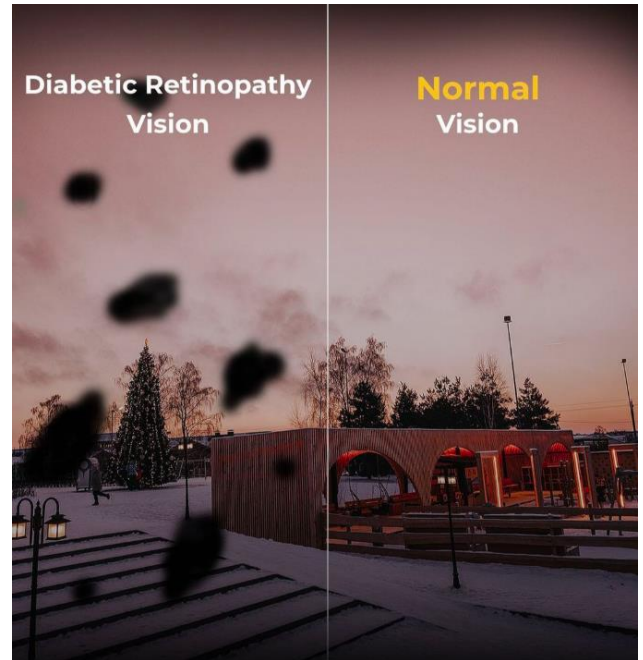
Diabetes can increase the risk of glaucoma, a condition that damages the optic nerve, often because of increased pressure inside the eye.

What Are the Symptoms?

In the early stages, diabetic eye disease often has no symptoms at all — vision may seem perfectly fine. That’s why regular eye exams are so important.

As the condition progresses, you might notice:

- Blurred or patchy vision
- Floaters or dark spots
- Trouble seeing at night
- Colors that appear faded
- Sudden changes in vision



If you notice sudden vision loss or flashing lights, you should contact your optometrist or ophthalmologist immediately, as this could be a sign of bleeding or retinal detachment.

How Is Diabetic Eye Disease Diagnosed?

Your optometrist can detect early signs of diabetic eye disease with a comprehensive eye exam. This usually includes:

Visual acuity testing: Checking how clearly you can see.

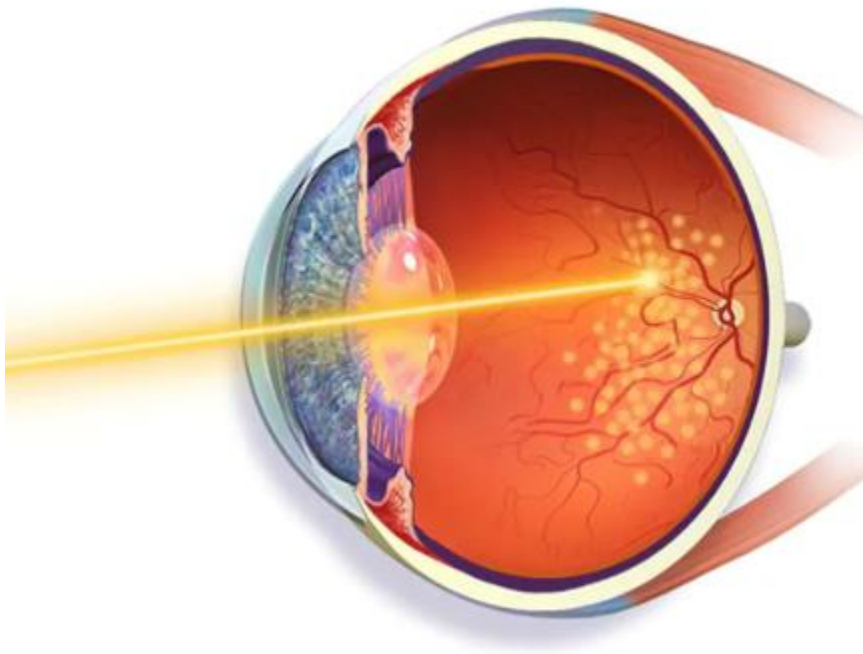
Pupil dilation: Eye drops widen your pupils so your doctor can examine the retina and optic nerve.

Retinal photography or OCT scans: These capture detailed images of the back of your eye, allowing even small changes to be tracked over time.

How Can It Be Treated?

Treatment depends on the type and stage of the disease.

Early diabetic retinopathy may just require careful monitoring and better control of blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol.



Advanced retinopathy or macular edema may require:

- Laser treatment to seal leaking blood vessels,
- Injections of medications that reduce swelling and stop new vessel growth, or
- Surgery (vitrectomy) if there's significant bleeding or scarring.

With early detection and modern treatments, many people maintain good vision for life.

How to Protect Your Eyes

You can greatly reduce your risk of vision loss by taking these steps:

Control your blood sugar. Keeping your blood glucose in the target range slows down damage to the tiny blood vessels in your eyes.

Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol healthy. High levels make blood vessel damage worse.

Have regular eye exams. Most people with diabetes should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam once a year — even if vision seems normal.

Don't smoke. Smoking makes it harder for oxygen to reach the retina and speeds up damage.

Stay active and eat well. Exercise, balanced meals, and plenty of fruits and vegetables help support both general and eye health.

Report changes in vision promptly. Early treatment is key to preventing vision loss.

In Summary

Diabetes can affect your eyes long before you notice any vision changes. The best way to protect your sight is through regular eye exams and good diabetes management. Keep your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol under control, and don't skip your yearly eye check. With early detection and proper care, you can keep your eyes — and your vision — healthy for years to come.

