

Diabetes

Annual eye exams are a crucial part of health care for people with diabetes.

It is estimated that diabetic retinopathy occurs in

~ALL Type 1 Diabetes¹

>50% Type 2 Diabetes²

within 20 years of diagnosis.

Eye exams can detect changes before vision is affected.
AHCIP offers partial coverage for diabetic health eye exams.³

WHAT IS DIABETIC RETINOPATHY?

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when tiny blood vessels in the retina become damaged by having too much sugar in your blood. This can lead to blood leakage, microaneurysms (small bulges in vessel walls), and reduced oxygen supply, which may trigger the growth of abnormal and weaker new vessels. Without treatment, diabetic retinopathy can lead to vision loss or blindness.

Symptoms

- + **Diabetic retinopathy often has no early symptoms,** regular eye exams are key.
- + Diabetes can affect nearsightedness, farsightedness, and cause early presbyopia (the inability to focus on close objects).
- + Other risks include early cataracts, glaucoma, eye muscle paralysis, and reduced corneal sensitivity which increases the risk of severe dry eye and vision-threatening corneal damage or infection.
- + Visual symptoms may include blurred or fluctuating vision, double vision, vision loss, and flashes or floaters.

Prevention

- + **Controlling blood sugar** lowers the risk of all diabetes-related health and vision concerns.
- + **Annual eye exams and regular checkups** help detect changes early and limit damage. Your Doctor of Optometry can co-manage your diabetes with your physician for the best outcomes.
- + The Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) provides partial coverage for diabetic health eye exams.³

Treatment

- + **Early detection and treatment of diabetic eye health changes is crucial** to improve outcomes.
- + **Eye treatments include** anti-VEGF injections into the eye (a therapy that stops the leaking of blood vessels), laser therapy, or in some cases retinal surgery (co-managed with a retinal surgeon).



For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website.
[optometrists.ab.ca](https://www.optometrists.ab.ca)

¹<https://aes.amegroups.org/article/view/5087/html>

²<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29183104/>

³*Optometrists can charge for insured services that the optometrist deems exceeds the AHCIP benefit and Albertans are responsible for additional costs incurred at the time of treatment. Practitioners are required to discuss fees with their patients before providing the service.*