



Diabetes

REGULAR EYE EXAMS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Annual eye exams are a crucial part of health care for people with diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy occurs in almost all people with type 1 diabetes within 20 years of diagnosis, and 80% of people with type 2 diabetes within 15 years of diagnosis. Changes in the eye due to diabetes can be detected during an eye exam, and before you notice any changes in your vision. Alberta Health coverage is available towards diabetic eye exams.

WHAT IS DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when the tiny blood vessels in the light sensitive tissue of the back part of the eye (retina) become damaged. This can result in blood leakage, bulges of the blood vessel walls (microaneurysms), lack of oxygen to the retina causing the growth of new blood vessels, along with other changes. If diabetic retinopathy is left untreated, blindness can result.

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SYMPTOMS

- In the early stages, retinopathy is often without symptoms, so regular eye exams are the best way to detect changes.
- Diabetes can cause changes in nearsightedness, farsightedness and premature presbyopia – the inability to focus on close objects.
- It can result in early cataracts, glaucoma, paralysis of the nerves that control the eye muscles or pupil, and decreased corneal sensitivity.
- Visual symptoms of diabetes include fluctuating or blurred vision, occasional double vision, loss of visual field and flashes and floaters within the eyes.

PREVENTION

- Stable blood sugar reduces the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, so it is important to monitor and maintain control of your diabetes.
- Annual eye exams with your doctor of optometry can help identify retinopathy as early as possible, so treatment can minimize damage.
- Also see your physician regularly and follow instructions about diet, exercise and medication. Your doctor of optometry can co-manage your diabetes with your physician for the best outcomes.

TREATMENT

- In the early stages, diabetic retinopathy is monitored through eye health examinations.
- Early detection of diabetic retinopathy is crucial, as treatment is much more likely to be successful at an early stage.
- If necessary, it may be treated with injections of anti-VEGF therapy into the eye or laser therapy. In other cases, retinal surgery may be necessary.
- People with diabetes should have annual eye exams, unless it has been recommended to have more frequent evaluations. Your doctor of optometry can co-manage treatment with an ophthalmologist or retinal surgeon.

Optometrists complete a Bachelor of Science degree or higher, followed by a four year Doctor of Optometry degree from an accredited university. They are a primary source for all your vision, eye health and eyewear needs. If you do not currently have an optometrist, visit our website at www.optometrists.ab.ca and click on *Find an Optometrist*. This will provide a list of optometrists in your area.

For information about many other common eye-related conditions, visit our website's Eye Health Library.
optometrists.ab.ca/eyehealthlibrary