

what you should know about
diabetic eye disease



Lions **Eye Health** Program
Empowering communities to save sight.

What is diabetic eye disease?

Diabetic eye disease is a general term for the visual complications that result from diabetes. It can cause severe vision loss or even blindness.

Diabetic eye disease may include:

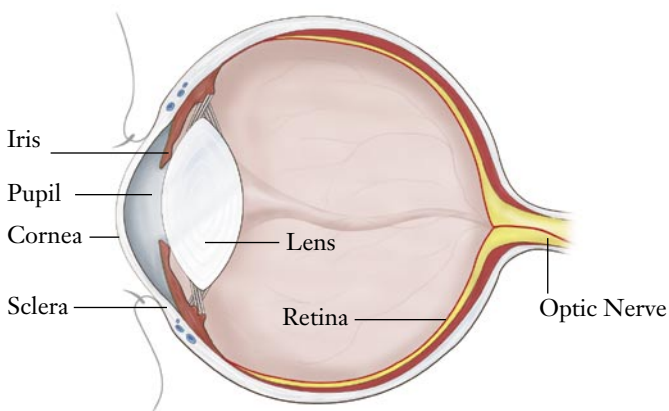
Diabetic retinopathy Damage to the blood vessels in the retina. This is the most common form of diabetic eye disease.

Cataract Clouding of the eye's lens.

Glaucoma Increase in fluid pressure inside the eye that leads to optic nerve damage and loss of vision.

Cataract and glaucoma also affect many people who do not have diabetes.

The anatomy of the eye



What is the most common diabetic eye disease?

Diabetic retinopathy. This disease is a leading cause of blindness in American adults. It is caused by changes in the blood vessels of the retina. In some people with diabetic retinopathy, retinal blood vessels may swell and leak fluid. In others, abnormal new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina. These changes may result in vision loss.

Who is at risk?

Anyone with diabetes. The longer someone has diabetes, the more likely they will get diabetic retinopathy. Nearly half of all people with diabetes will develop some degree of diabetic retinopathy during their lifetimes.

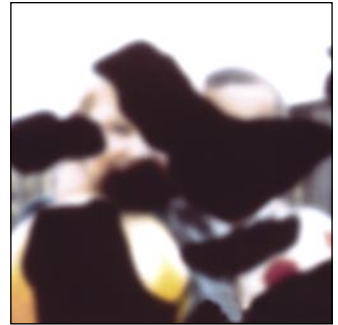
What are its symptoms?

There aren't any, at first. The early stages of the disease are usually painless and don't affect vision.

When the disease progresses, the macula—the part of the retina that provides sharp, central vision—swells from leaking fluid. This condition is called macular edema and can cause blurred vision. If new blood vessels have grown on the surface of the retina, they can bleed into the eye, blocking vision. Even in the most advanced cases, the disease may progress a long way without symptoms.



Normal Vision



Diabetic Retinopathy

How is it detected?

Through an examination of the retina. To get a good look at the retina, an eye care professional will use eye drops to dilate, or enlarge the pupils. They may also use a non-mydrriatic retinal camera. Non-mydrriatic means “without dilation.” This instrument can see the retina without the bother of using eye drops.

Can diabetic retinopathy be treated?

Yes. Although diabetic retinopathy can't be cured, laser surgery is usually very effective at preventing vision loss if treatment is done before the retina is severely damaged. Laser surgery has been proven to reduce the risk of severe vision loss from diabetic retinopathy by 90 percent.

Laser surgery cannot restore vision that has already been lost to retinopathy. That is why finding diabetic retinopathy early is the best way to prevent vision loss.

Can diabetic retinopathy be prevented?

Not totally, but the risk can be greatly reduced. Studies show that better control of blood sugar levels slows the development of retinopathy, and lessens the need for laser surgery. Keeping blood sugar levels within a safe range helps avoid eye, kidney, and nerve disease.

A dilated eye exam at least once a year is recommended for anyone with diabetes.

How common are the other diabetic eye diseases?

Cataracts are twice as likely to develop in a person with diabetes and will occur at an earlier age. Cataracts can usually be treated by surgery.

Glaucoma is nearly twice as likely in a person with diabetes. And, as with diabetic retinopathy, the longer a person has diabetes, the greater the risk of getting glaucoma. Glaucoma is usually treated with medications or laser surgery.

What can you do to protect your vision?

If you have diabetes, make sure you get a dilated eye examination at least once a year.

For those without insurance, Medicare, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Optometric Association help those with diabetes get their eyes checked. To qualify a person must have diabetes, be over 65 and eligible for Medicare. To get the name of an ophthalmologist participating in the EyeCare Americasm—National Eye Care Project[®] in a specific area, call the 24 hour toll-free number at 1-800-222-3937.

What if some vision has already been lost?

Even if diabetic retinopathy has already caused some vision loss there are resources available to help make the most of remaining vision. Write the contacts below or visit them online for more information.

Now that you know, don't lose sight of diabetic eye disease.

To learn more about diabetic eye disease, visit www.LEHP.org or the National Eye Institute at www.nei.nih.gov. You can also write the National Health Education Program at, 2020 Vision Place, Bethesda, MD 20892-3655



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For more information, visit:
www.lehp.org

or call:

1.800.982.0356

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