

# Understanding diabetes and eye health

Diabetes affects over 38 million Americans, leading to potential eye damage due to high blood sugar levels. This can result in health problems like diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and cataracts, which can impair vision and even lead to blindness <sup>[1],[2],[3]</sup>.

## How diabetes affects your eyes

Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults aged 18–64 years <sup>[4]</sup>. Diabetes can significantly impact your vision, leading to various eye diseases:

- **Diabetic Retinopathy:** Caused by damage to the blood vessels of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of your eye. Diabetes can cause these vessels to leak blood or form abnormal vessels, potentially leading to vision loss <sup>[5]</sup>.
- **Glaucoma:** Occurs when increased pressure inside your eye damages the optic nerve (a bundle of nerve fibers that carries messages from the eye to the brain). Vision loss from glaucoma usually affects peripheral vision (what you see to the side while looking forward) first. In some cases, it can affect your central (forward-facing) vision. <sup>[6]</sup>
- **Cataracts:** This health problem is characterized by clouding of the eye's lens, leading to blurred vision and difficulty seeing both near and far. Some people may also see glare or halos around lights <sup>[7]</sup>.

If you have diabetes, you can help prevent eye diseases by managing your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol through diet and exercise and taking any medications as prescribed.

Have your hemoglobin A1C (a blood test that measures the average blood sugar levels) checked as recommended. Proper management of your diabetes, which should include regular comprehensive eye exams, can lower the risk of complications <sup>[8]</sup>.

## Comprehensive eye exams

A comprehensive eye exam for diabetes care checks the health of your eyes to detect diabetic retinopathy and other eye problems. **Finding eye disease early can help protect your vision, making an annual dilated eye exam essential for those living with diabetes** <sup>[9]</sup>. During these exams, your doctor will check for signs of eye diseases using various tests and tools.

## RetinaRisk™ Calculator

Scan the QR code to use the free [RetinaRisk calculator](#) from the American Diabetes Association® (ADA) to learn about your risk of developing diabetic retinopathy. This tool can help you and your care team take care of, and lower the risk of eye disease.

## Learn more

Talk to your doctor to learn more about how diabetes affects eye health and discuss with your care team how to best manage your eye care, protect your vision and maintain a healthy lifestyle for proactive diabetes management.

[optum.com/MedicalCare](https://optum.com/MedicalCare)

### References

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