

Are you at risk for diabetic retinopathy?

For most of us, our eyesight is not the first thing that comes to mind when we think about diabetes. But actually, diabetes is the leading cause for new cases of blindness among American adults.¹

Diabetic retinopathy is the most common eye complication in diabetic patients, affecting more than 8 million Americans age 40 and older.² That's because increased blood sugar in diabetic patients can easily damage the tiny blood vessels in the retina, the part of the eye that captures and sends images to the brain. When these vessels are damaged, it can result in blood and fluid leakage in the retina, closure of the blood vessels or formation of new vessels over the retina's surface—all of which can inhibit your vision and cause vision loss.³

Because its initial symptoms are very slight or even unnoticeable, diabetic retinopathy often goes undiagnosed until it's too late. However, it can be detected during an annual comprehensive eye exam. When your eye doctor dilates your eyes, he or she can check your blood vessels for signs of damage.³

Your doctor can then track changes and abnormalities between visits and refer you to your primary care physician if necessary. In addition to getting a dilated eye examination, it's important to tell your eye care provider if you notice any changes to your vision, including:

- Blurry, double or cloudy vision
- Pain or pressure in one or both eyes
- Trouble with peripheral vision
- Floating or flashing lights
- Dark spots⁴

While there is no cure for diabetes or diabetic retinopathy, proper medication, close monitoring of blood sugar levels, a healthy diet and regular exercise help manage this disease and reduce the likelihood of vision-related complications.

1. "Diabetic Retinopathy Data and Statistics", National Eye Institute, November 19, 2020, <https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health/outreach-campaigns-and-resources/eye-health-data-and-statistics/diabetic-retinopathy-data-and-statistics>.
2. "Americans in the Dark on Diabetic Retinopathy Symptoms, Risks, Survey Finds", American Society of Retina Specialists, October 29, 2020, <https://www.asrs.org/sections/member-news/5097/Americans-in-the-Dark-on-Diabetic-Retinopathy-Symptoms-Risks-Survey-Finds>.
3. "Diabetic retinopathy", Mayo Clinic, June 24, 2021, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetic-retinopathy/symptoms-causes/syc-20371611>.
4. "Diabetic Retinopathy: Causes, Symptoms, Treatment", American Academy of Ophthalmology, September 14, 2021, <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-diabetic-retinopathy>.