

Diabetes

Questions

Do I need to see the optometrist if I do not have vision problems?

Diabetic retinopathy may not obviously affect your vision early on, so it is very important to have a regular eye health examination. Remember, early detection and treatment reduce the risk of future vision loss.

Does poor vision mean diabetes has damaged my eyes?

The main reason people with diabetes do not see the eye chart well is the same reason other people don't see well - long-sightedness, short-sightedness or astigmatism. People with diabetes are known to have fluctuating vision but the majority are capable of seeing clearly with the correct prescription glasses.

What is diabetes?

To function we need to convert glucose (sugar) from food into energy using insulin. Diabetes is a condition in which too little or no insulin is produced by the body, which leads to high blood glucose (sugar).

How does diabetes affect your eyes?

Diabetes affects many parts of the eye. Early in the disease, there are often no signs or symptoms. Symptoms of diabetes may be blurred, fluctuating vision, double vision or flashes and floaters. Diabetes may also contribute to the development of cataracts and glaucoma. The most serious complication of diabetes is diabetic retinopathy.

What causes diabetic retinopathy?

Diabetic retinopathy occurs when high blood sugar damages the fine blood vessels of the retina - the light-sensitive film at the back of the eye. This causes the vessels to leak blood, the retina to swell and new blood vessels to start growing. If left untreated, diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness.

Who gets diabetic retinopathy?

The risk of developing diabetic retinopathy is greater if diabetes has been present for a long time or blood sugar levels are not well controlled. Other risk factors include smoking, poor diet and elevated blood pressure. To reduce the risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, it is important to control your blood sugar levels as much as possible.

How does an optometrist diagnose diabetic retinopathy?

As part of your eye examination your optometrist will check the health of your eyes. It is common for your optometrist to put eye drops in your eyes when checking for diabetic retinopathy. They may need to take a photograph of your retina for comparison at your next eye examination.

If you are diabetic, your optometrist may need to see you more often than once every two years. They will usually refer patients whom they suspect have diabetic retinopathy to an ophthalmologist (eye surgeon) for confirmation and treatment.

How is diabetic retinopathy treated?

In its early stages, diabetic retinopathy is monitored with regular eye examinations. If more severe diabetic retinopathy is suspected, your optometrist will refer you to an ophthalmologist for treatment. If needed, the ophthalmologist may use laser to treat the leaking blood vessels. In some cases, eye surgery may be required.

Treatment for diabetic retinopathy aims to prevent further damage to the eye and keep the best vision for as long as possible. Usually surgery cannot restore vision that has been lost.

It is important to remember that early detection and if necessary, treatment are the best ways to reduce the risk of vision loss from diabetic retinopathy.

Regular eye examinations are your best protection against vision loss from diabetes.

Your optometrist

