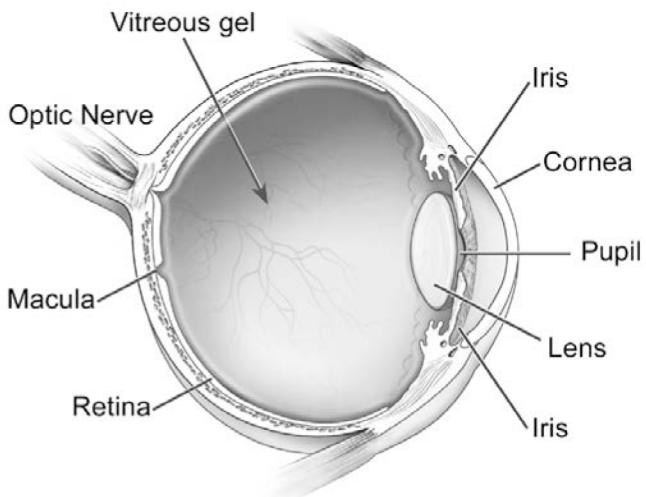
1 What is diabetic eye disease?

It is a group of eye problems that people with diabetes may get. All of these eye problems can lead to vision loss or blindness. Here are some of these eye problems:

- **Diabetic retinopathy**—Causes harm to the blood vessels in the retina. The retina is the layer of tissue in the back of the eye that is sensitive to light.
- **Cataract**—Causes your eye lens to get cloudy.
- **Glaucoma**—Causes damage to the optic nerve that can lead to vision loss.



2 Who is most likely to get diabetic eye disease?

Anyone with diabetes can get this disease. The longer someone has diabetes, the more likely they are to get diabetic eye disease.

3 Which diabetic eye disease do most people get?

Diabetic retinopathy is a leading cause of blindness in people with diabetes. This disease happens when blood vessels in the retina get weak and leak fluid. It also happens when new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina. As the new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina, they can bleed into the eye and block vision.

Normal vision.

A scene as it might be viewed by a person with diabetic retinopathy.

4 What are the symptoms of diabetic retinopathy?

In the early stages of the disease, many times there are no symptoms or pain. As some blood vessels get weak and leak fluid or bleed, vision may start to blur.

5 How do you know if you have it?

An eye care professional can tell if you have diabetic retinopathy by giving you a comprehensive dilated eye exam. During the exam, drops are placed in your eyes to widen, or dilate, the pupils. Then a special lens is used to look at the retina for damage to blood vessels. After the exam, your vision may be blurry for a period of hours.

6 How is diabetic retinopathy treated?

Laser eye surgery can close or shrink the new abnormal blood vessels that can leak blood into the eye and cause vision loss. It can also slow or stop the fluid leakage from retina vessels that can cause vision loss. Newer treatments include injections of drugs into the eye to prevent this leakage and this often leads to improved vision.

7 Can it be prevented?

People with diabetes can dramatically slow or prevent the development of this eye disease by keeping their blood sugar, blood pressure, and blood cholesterol under control and having regular eye exams to check on the eye disease.

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8 What are some other common diabetic eye diseases?

Cataract and glaucoma are other eye diseases that are more common in people with diabetes. They are two times more likely to get cataract and glaucoma than someone without diabetes. Cataract can be treated with surgery. Glaucoma can be treated with both surgery and medicines.

9 What can you do to protect your vision?

All people with diabetes should keep control of their blood sugar, blood pressure, and blood cholesterol while continuing to have a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year. Women with diabetes who are pregnant should see their eye care professional as soon as possible and all through their pregnancy.

For more information, contact—

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National Eye Health Education Program NEHEP

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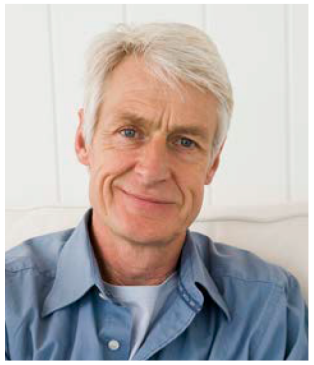
Don't lose sight of Diabetic Eye Disease



Information for people at risk