

Visual Health and Diabetes



Diabetes can cause eye damage and even blindness. This is because the condition can cause damage to the small blood vessels of the retina, which is the back of the eye. This is known as diabetic retinopathy. Diabetes also increases the risk of glaucoma, cataracts, and other eye problems. However, good management of the condition and regular eye exams are beneficial in preventing vision problems and stopping them before they get worse.

How diabetes affects the eyes?

Diabetes can affect eye health when blood glucose is too high. In the short term, you are unlikely to have any vision damage. However, if the blood glucose level stays high for too long, it can damage the small blood vessels at the back of the eyes.

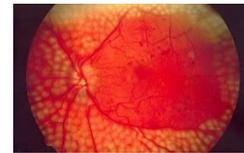
In addition, it has been observed that when the diabetes care plan or medications are changed, the person may have blurred vision; for a few days or weeks, as the blood glucose level returns to normal.

Eye damage can start as early as a person has prediabetes. Fluid can leak from damaged blood vessels, causing swelling. Also, new blood vessels may begin to form, but they will be weak. These blood vessels can bleed in the middle of the eye, form scar tissue, or cause the pressure inside the eye to rise to a dangerous level.

The four eye diseases that can pose a threat to sight are: diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema, glaucoma, and cataracts.

Diabetic retinopathy

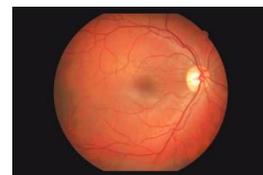
Diabetic retinopathy is caused by diabetes, where the blood vessels in the retina are damaged. This disease is the leading cause of blindness in working-age adults.



In the early stage of the disease, known as non-proliferative diabetic retinopathy, blood vessels may weaken, bulge, or leak fluid into the retina. If the disease progresses, some blood vessels close. This stage is known as proliferative diabetic retinopathy. Abnormal blood vessels can cause serious vision problems. Screening and treatment of early-stage diabetic retinopathy can reduce the risk of blindness.

Diabetic macular edema

The macula is the part of the retina that is needed to read, drive, and see faces. Diabetes causes swelling of the macula, which is known as diabetic macular edema. Over time, this disease can destroy clear vision in this part of the eye, causing partial vision loss or blindness.



Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that can damage the optic nerve, usually due to too much pressure in the eye. Many types of glaucoma cause no symptoms, and vision loss can happen slowly. Diabetes increases the chances of glaucoma, which can cause vision loss and blindness if not treated early.



The Falls

The lenses that we have inside our eyes are known as crystalline lenses. These are transparent structures that allow us to have clear vision. As we age, they tend to become cloudy with the appearance of cataracts. People with diabetes may develop cataracts at a younger age than people who do not have it. Studies have shown that high levels of glucose cause deposits to build up in the lenses.



Preventing or delaying eye diseases

- Perform an eye exam at least once a year so that the eye doctor can catch problems early.
- Keep your blood sugar levels within your range as much as possible.
- Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol levels within their normal ranges.
- Do not smoke.
- Perform physical activity.
- Use medications as directed by your doctor.

When to contact an ophthalmologist?

Make an appointment with an eye doctor if you have diabetes and haven't seen an optometrist or ophthalmologist in the past year. Also, check with your doctor if you have any type of eye discomfort.



Social and Emotional Aspects

For tips, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after your treatment, please visit your primary care physician or call the following hotlines:

Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/ TDD: 1-844-347-7804

APS Healthcare

787-641-9133

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/es/diabetes-complications/la-diabetes-y-la-perdida-de-la-vision.html>

<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/diabeticeyeproblems.html>

Prepared by Licensed Health Educators.

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