

Preparing for a Visit to **Your Eye Doctor**

For those living with, or who are at-risk for diabetes, an annual comprehensive eye exam is a simple and non-invasive way to detect or delay eye disease and vision loss caused by diabetes. As part of a comprehensive eye exam, pupil dilation allows your eye doctor to see the entire retina. Early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care with an eye doctor (optometrist or ophthalmologist) can reduce a person's risk for severe vision loss from diabetic eye disease by 95%.

Getting an annual eye exam does not have to be stressful! Here are some tips on making the most of your visit:

Know that you may not have symptoms

Often diabetic retinopathy (damage to the blood vessels in the retina) has no symptoms, which is why regular comprehensive eye exams are so important for early detection and treatment - before vision loss occurs. If you've noticed a change in your vision, don't wait until your next appointment - see your eye doctor right away and be prepared to share the following information:

- Any symptoms or changes in your eyesight that you experience (floaters, blurred vision, flashing lights) and when they began
- What your blood sugar (blood glucose) levels are when symptoms occur
- Any medical changes (new medications, etc.)
- Other information you think may be important to share

Understand your risk factors

When combined with high blood sugar, many other factors can increase your risk of vision problems, including:

- How long you've had diabetes
- Your diabetes (A1C) management
- Tobacco use
- High blood pressure (hypertension)

- High cholesterol
- Pregnancy
- Belonging to a high-risk group (Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, American Indian, Alaska Native or Asian)

Know what to expect at a diabetic eye exam

If you are nervous about a doctor getting close to your eyes, do not worry. The exam itself is straightforward and few find it uncomfortable. While exams may slightly vary from doctor to doctor, here's what you can generally expect:

Your eye doctor will first check whether there is a change in your eyeglass or contact lens prescription.



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Next, the eye doctor will place a few drops in your eyes (it may sting briefly) to dilate the pupils so they can examine the health of your retina (tissue at the back of the eye). Twenty to 30 minutes later, your pupils will be fully dilated, and your vision will be blurry—don't worry, this is normal. Using special lenses and lights, the doctor will be able to examine the retina in much greater detail. The effects of the drops may last anywhere from two to six hours, so it is recommended that you arrange for alternative transportation home. You are also likely to be more sensitive to light, so bring a pair of sunglasses to make your trip home more comfortable.

To detect retinopathy, the doctor will examine the entire retina. Some areas of your retina provide very little useful vision, but they contain some of the smallest blood vessels in your body and are especially sensitive to damage from diabetes.

As part of any comprehensive exam, your eye doctor will check for cataracts (clouding of the lens in the eye) and glaucoma (high pressure in the eye), which are additional eye conditions that can occur in people with diabetes even if they have no signs of retinal disease.

Contact your eye doctor today to schedule your comprehensive eye exam. To learn more about health and find an eye care provider near you, visit eyehealth.diabetes.org

