

# Your eyes and diabetes:

control your sugar, protect your sight

**What's the best way to keep your eyes**

**healthy?**

**If you have diabetes, the key is good blood sugar control! Every 1-point drop in your A1C (blood sugar) level can lower your risk for vision problems by 40%.**

**Since you can have a vision problem and not know it, you should also get a dilated eye exam at least once a year.**

Did you know that diabetes causes most new cases of blindness in people between the ages of 20 and 74? And that most people with type 2 diabetes will develop some degree of eye damage?

Vision problems caused by diabetes can be scary. But here's some good news. You can still protect your eyes and help keep them healthy well into the future.

## What kinds of eye problems can diabetes cause?

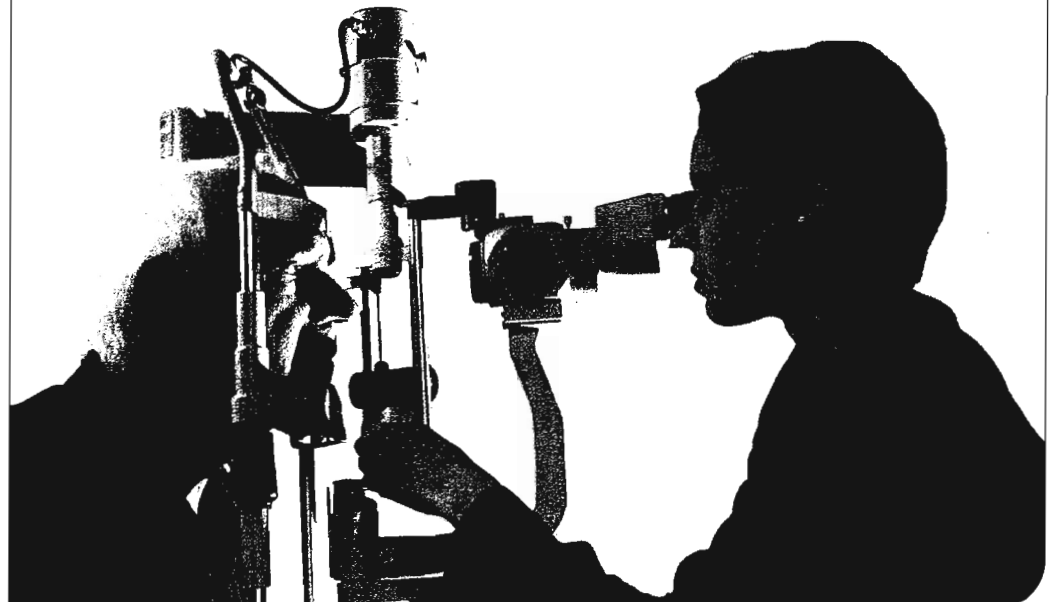
Having diabetes increases your risk for vision problems such as glaucoma (*glau-CO-mah*), which damages your vision because of increased pressure in your eye, and cataracts (*CAT-uh-racts*), which cause foggy or cloudy vision. The most common cause of vision loss for people with diabetes is diabetic retinopathy (*reh-tin-AH-path-ee*).

## What causes retinopathy?

Your blood travels through blood vessels to bring oxygen to every part of your body, including your eyes. Over time, diabetes can damage the blood vessels in your eyes. These damaged vessels can become swollen or blocked. Once this happens, blood from these vessels can leak into the retina (*REH-tin-uh*), the part of your eye that forms the pictures of what you see. This can cause vision problems.

## How will I know if I have retinopathy?

You can have retinopathy and not know it, since it may not change your vision until it gets worse. That's why it is so important to get a special eye exam, called a dilated (*DIE-lay-ted*) eye exam, at least once a year.





## Ask for your dilated eye exam

*...at least once every year. Otherwise, you may not know you have an eye problem until it becomes very serious.*

*A dilated eye exam by an eye doctor can let you know if you have a problem early enough to help stop it from getting worse.*

*Always let your primary healthcare provider know you are getting the exam and take the results of your exam back to him or her. This will ensure you get the right follow-up care.*

## What's a dilated eye exam?

A dilated eye exam is very different from a routine vision or eyeglass exam. During a dilated eye exam, your eye doctor will use special drops to open (dilate) your pupils. The pupil is the part of your eye that lets light enter. After dilating your pupils, the doctor will be able to see inside your eyes to look for problems like retinopathy. Generally, eye doctors perform dilated eye exams.

## How can I help to avoid eye problems?

One of the best things you can do to protect your eyesight is to **keep your blood sugar under control**. Your healthcare provider will tell you what your blood sugar level should be. By staying at or below this goal, you can help protect your eyes and many other parts of your body.

You should also try to keep your blood pressure (BP) as low as possible. High BP can damage all your blood vessels, including those inside your eyes. If you also have high blood sugar, high BP can be even more harmful to your eyes.

## What can I do if I have retinopathy?

Less serious types of retinopathy may not need treatment. But you will need to work with your healthcare provider to keep your blood sugar and BP under control. It is also very important to keep seeing your eye doctor at least once a year.

If you need treatment, you may have some choices. Ask your doctor about treatments that are right for you.

Together with your healthcare provider, you can work out a plan to keep your eyes healthy. Be sure to speak up if you have any questions—and remember to get a full eye exam from an eye doctor at least once a year.

For more information, visit MerckSource™ at [www.mercksource.com](http://www.mercksource.com).

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