



Patient & Family Guide
2021

Diabetes and the Eye

Aussi disponible en français :
Le diabète et les yeux (FF85-1784)



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Diabetes and the Eye

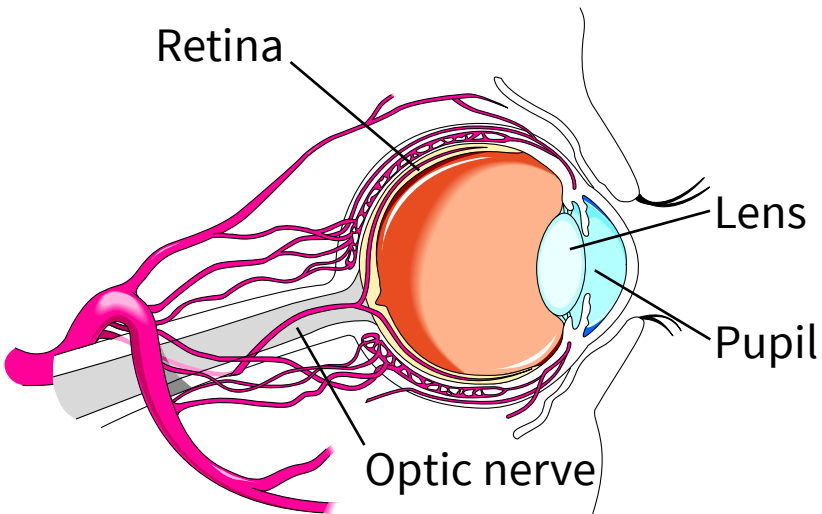
What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease in which your body cannot control the level of sugar (glucose) in your blood or use sugar for energy the way it should.

What causes diabetes?

Your body releases a hormone called insulin to control the level of sugar in your blood. Diabetes can be caused by:

- › not having enough insulin.
- › insulin not working properly.



How does diabetes affect the eyes?

Diabetes can affect many organs, including the nerves, kidneys, heart, and eyes. In the eyes, diabetes can lead to:

- › Blurred vision or a hard time focusing (with poorly controlled and high levels of sugar in the blood)
- › Cataracts (clouding of the lens of the eye)
- › Double vision (if it affects the nerves that control eye movement)
- › Glaucoma (caused by damage to the optic nerve)
- › Diabetic retinopathy (changes in the blood vessels of the retina)
- › Diabetic macular edema (swelling in the macula [very small centre area of your retina, which gives you the central vision needed to do things like reading, watching TV, and seeing faces])
- › Vitreous hemorrhage (blood in the centre of the eye that blocks your vision)

- › Retinal detachment (retina pulls away from the wall of the eye)

What is diabetic retinopathy?

- The retina is the very thin, delicate tissue at the back of the eye that changes light into visual images in your brain. It acts like the film in a camera. Diabetic retinopathy happens when changes take place in the blood vessels near the retina, causing leaks or bleeding.
- In the early stages of this condition, the vessels can get weak and leak fluid or blood. Your vision may be normal or blurry.
- Sometimes the vessels in the retina close and the retina does not get enough oxygen to be healthy. New blood vessels can grow to replace these closed vessels. These new vessels are fragile and may cause bleeding into the eye. This bleeding blocks vision and may form scar tissue. Scar tissue can then pull on the retina and cause a retinal detachment (separation). This can result in loss of vision or even blindness.

How is diabetic retinopathy treated?

Laser treatment is used to seal leaky vessels and to help keep new, fragile ones from growing. Some people will need a surgery called a vitrectomy to remove large amounts of blood and/or tissue from the eye. Others may also need surgery to repair a detached (loose) retina.

What is diabetic macular edema?

This is swelling in the macula. It may be caused by diabetes, happen after eye surgery, or happen for no known reason. When it happens for no known reason, it is called “idiopathic”.

How is diabetic macular edema treated?

An ophthalmologist (eye doctor) will inject medication directly into your eye. The type of medication(s) depends on your condition. The ophthalmologist will choose the best medication for you and your condition.

Diabetic retinopathy and diabetic macular edema may or may not cause changes in vision.

What can I do to help my eyes?

Severe (very bad) loss of vision may be helped or slowed by laser treatments. **It is important to find any problems early.** The best way for you to help is to have an eye exam every year to help find early signs of diabetic retinopathy.

Good control of blood sugar is important in keeping your eyes healthy. Healthy foods, medication, and exercise will help keep your diabetes under control. It is also very important to control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

