



Don't Lose Sight

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of Good Vision Care

Eye conditions can affect people in all stages of life, even childhood. That's why eye and vision screenings should begin before age 5.

Many of the eye problems that affect older people actually start much

sooner. If caught early, though, they can often be treated effectively so that vision is preserved. Ask your eye doctor if you may be at risk for problems like glaucoma or diabetic eye disease and how often you should have an eye exam.

Cataracts and Glaucoma

Cataracts and glaucoma are two common eye diseases that anyone can have. However, people with diabetes get them more often and at a younger age.

A **cataract** (KAT-er-act) is a cloudiness in the lens of your eye, which makes everything you look at seem cloudy or out of focus. You may eventually need simple out-patient surgery to remove the cataract and help you see clearly again. During surgery, your lens is taken out and a plastic lens, like a contact lens, is inserted. The plastic lens stays in your eye all the time.

Glaucoma (glaw-KOH-muh) starts when pressure builds up in the eye. In time, this pressure damages the optic nerve, your eye's main nerve. The damage first causes you to lose sight from the sides of your eyes. There are no clues to this kind of loss of sight.

Without treatment, you can go blind. Treating glaucoma is usually simple. Depending on your condition, your eye doctor will either give you special drops to use every day or suggest laser surgery.

Diabetic Eye Disease

High blood sugar and high blood pressure from diabetes can damage your eye. Diabetic retinopathy (RET-in-OP-uh-thee) is the medical term for the most common eye problem caused by diabetes. Retina damage happens slowly. Your retinas have tiny blood vessels that are easy to damage. First, these tiny blood vessels swell and weaken. Some blood vessels then become clogged and do not let enough blood through. At first, you might not have any loss of sight from these changes. This is why you need to have a dilated eye exam once a year, even if your sight seems fine. You just can't tell for sure without being examined.

You can have the dilated eye exam at the same time as your eyeglass exam. A dilated eye exam is simple and painless. During the exam, the doctor will put drops in your eyes to enlarge the pupils (centers) so he or she can examine them. These drops are not the same as the ones you may get during your routine eyeglass exam.

How to prevent or delay diabetic eye disease

First, keep your blood sugar and blood pressure as close to normal as you can. If your eye doctor does detect diabetic eye disease, he or she may suggest laser treatment, which involves a light beam aimed into the retina of the damaged eye. The beam closes off leaking blood vessels to stop blood and fluid from leaking. Laser treatment may slow the loss of sight.

If a lot of blood has already leaked, and your sight is poor, your eye doctor might suggest surgery called a vitrectomy (vih-TREK-toh-mee). A vitrectomy removes blood and fluids from the vitreous of your eye. Then clean fluid is put back into the eye. The surgery often makes your eyesight better.

If you notice any signs of potential eye problems, see an eye doctor for a complete eye exam. Even if you have no signs, you need a regular eye exam. Early detection and treatment can be the key to preventing sight loss.

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American Academy of Ophthalmology
www.aao.org

American Diabetes Association
888-DIABETES
www.diabetes.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30333
800-311-3435
www.cdc.gov

National Eye Institute
2020 Vision Place
Bethesda, MD 20892-3655
301-496-5248
www.nei.nih.gov/

Prevent Blindness America
800-331-2020
www.preventblindness.org

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