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A prescription for maintaining healthy eyes with your diabetes

Diabetes is the single largest cause of blindness in Canada.

Over time, diabetes can cause changes in the retina at the back of the eye. Your retina helps you see by acting like a film projector in the back of your eye, projecting the image to your brain. The change is called retinopathy and there are a couple of different types that affect people with diabetes. The macula, which is the part of your retina that helps you to see colour, becomes swollen (macular edema) and this can cause blindness. A second complication is the growth of new weak blood vessels that break and leak blood into your eye so the retina cannot project images to your brain (proliferative diabetic retinopathy). The result is a loss of sight.

How do I know if I have retinopathy?

In early stages there may be no symptoms, which is why it is important to have regular eye exams. Symptoms, if present, can include:

- blurred vision
- flashes of light in the field of vision
- sudden loss of vision
- blotches or spots in vision

How can I prevent retinopathy?

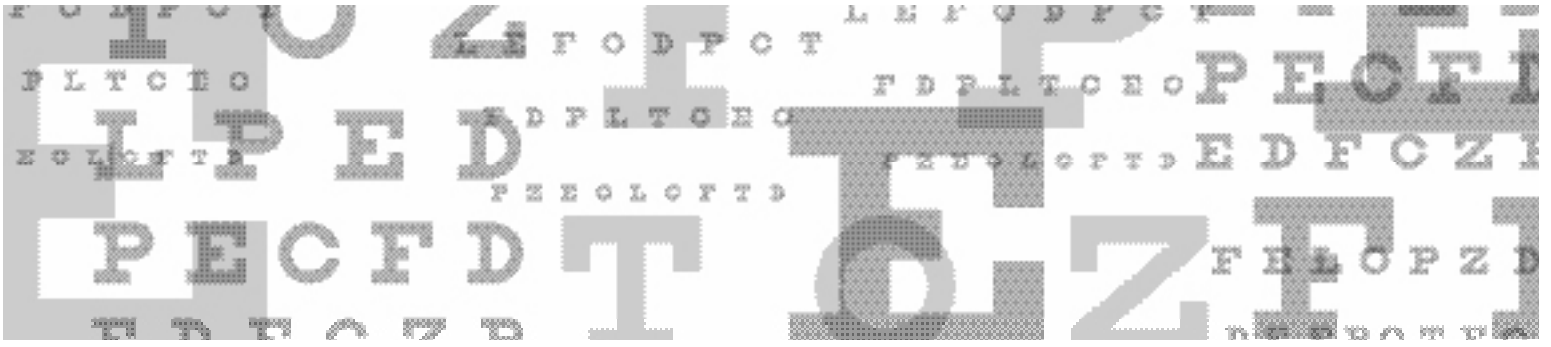
Retinopathy affects 23% of people with type 1 diabetes and 14% of people with type 2 diabetes on insulin therapy. The good news is that there are steps you can take to catch this complication early and prevent its progress:

- Visit your CAO optometrist at least once per year. Your optometrist may recommend you visit more or less frequently depending on your situation.
- Maintain optimal blood glucose levels, blood pressure and blood cholesterol.
- Know your A1C (a test of your average blood glucose level over three months). Most people with diabetes should aim for a target of 7.0 or less. Talk to your healthcare team about what your target should be.

Who should be screened for retinopathy?

- Any individual older than 15 with type 1 diabetes should be screened annually beginning five years after the onset of diabetes.
- All individuals with type 2 diabetes should be screened at the time of diagnosis and annually thereafter.
- Women with type 1 or type 2 diabetes or women who hope to become pregnant should be screened before conception, during the first trimester, as needed during pregnancy and within the first year post partum.





See your optometrist regularly and follow up with an eye exam every:

- 1 year
- 2 years
- Other

For more information about vision and diabetes, visit the Canadian Diabetes Association website at diabetes.ca/vision-health. By exploring the site, you'll also find helpful information on:

- Living a healthy life with diabetes, including recipes and our online Healthy Living Series.
- How to access our public programs and services in your community.
- Our efforts to advocate on behalf of people with diabetes and the research we are funding to help us search for a cure.
- How you can get involved and help us by volunteering or making a donation.

For more information about vision health or to find a CAO optometrist in your area, visit the Canadian Association of Optometrists website at opto.ca

Notes:

Optometrist's phone number and address:

Related articles: Diabetes; Type 2 Diabetes: The Basics; Type 1 Diabetes: The Basics; Staying Healthy with Diabetes

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