



The effect of diabetes on vision

Tips to protect your eyes

Understanding diabetes

Diabetes affects how the body uses sugar or glucose. With type 2 diabetes, the body doesn't use insulin (a hormone that helps turn blood sugar into energy) the right way. This is called insulin resistance. At first, the pancreas works overtime to make more insulin, but eventually, it can't produce enough to keep blood sugar at normal levels.



There are more than 37 million people who have diabetes in the U.S. today and another 96 million American adults have prediabetes. For adults with diagnosed diabetes, 12% reported having vision impairment or blindness.¹

Having diabetes can increase your risk for eye conditions, such as retinopathy, cataracts, and glaucoma, which can affect your vision.

Retinopathy

The retina is the layer at the back of the eye with cells that are sensitive to light. Retinopathy happens when the blood vessels in the retina swell and leak fluid. New blood vessels can also grow on the retina, leaking fluid and stopping light from reaching it. This causes blurry vision. In serious cases, it can lead to blindness.

Cataracts

The eye lens is behind the iris and pupil. It works much like a camera lens, focusing light onto the retina for clear vision. This lens, made mostly of water and protein, adjusts the eye's focus for seeing things up close and far away. The protein helps keep the lens clear and allows light to pass through it. As people age, the protein may clump together and start to cloud part of the lens. This is a cataract.

Glaucoma

This is pressure in the eye, which causes harm to the optic nerve. Without treatment, people with glaucoma will slowly lose their peripheral (side) vision, making them unable to see objects to the side and out of the corner of their eye. It feels like looking at things through a tunnel. Over time, straight-ahead (central) vision can become worse until it's lost completely.

Diabetes and light sensitivity

Having diabetes can make people more sensitive to the sun, especially when they're taking medications for conditions like high blood pressure. Protecting your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays isn't only for people living with diabetes. Over time, the sun's UV rays can damage eyesight through cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. UV rays can also cause skin cancer around the eyelid or sunburn on the eye surface.

Safety precautions to protect vision

- 1. Wear sunglasses.** Choose ones that block 100% of UV rays, even on cloudy days.
- 2. Choose UV protective lenses.** Wear contact lenses that filter out UV or Transitions® lenses for your glasses, which are regular lenses indoors but turn as dark as sunglasses outdoors. They block 100% of UVA and UVB rays. Covered dependents under age 19 can get them at no cost.
- 3. Select bigger sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat.** They help protect the area around your eyes, blocking UV rays from the top and sides of your face.

The need for annual eye exams

If you have diabetes, managing it with the right medication, keeping an eye on your blood sugar, eating well, and staying active are important. It's also important to schedule annual eye exams that include dilation. These exams help eye care professionals catch issues early when they're easier to treat.²

How dilation works

With dilation, an eye care professional places drops in each eye to widen the pupil, which is at the center of the colored part of the eye called the iris. Dilation is a key part of a comprehensive eye exam because it allows your eye care professional to see the inside of the eye.



To find eye care professionals in your plan's network near you, use Find Care on the SydneySM Health mobile app or [anthem.com](https://www.anthem.com). If you have diabetes, your Blue View VisionSM network eye doctor is here to help protect your vision. Reach out to them if you have questions or to schedule an eye exam.



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *The Facts, Stats, and Impacts of Diabetes* (November 24, 2021); [cdc.gov/diabetes](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes).

² American Academy of Ophthalmology: *20 Surprising Health Problems an Eye Exam Can Catch* (April 29, 2022); [aaao.org](https://www.aaao.org).

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