



# Your eyes and diabetes

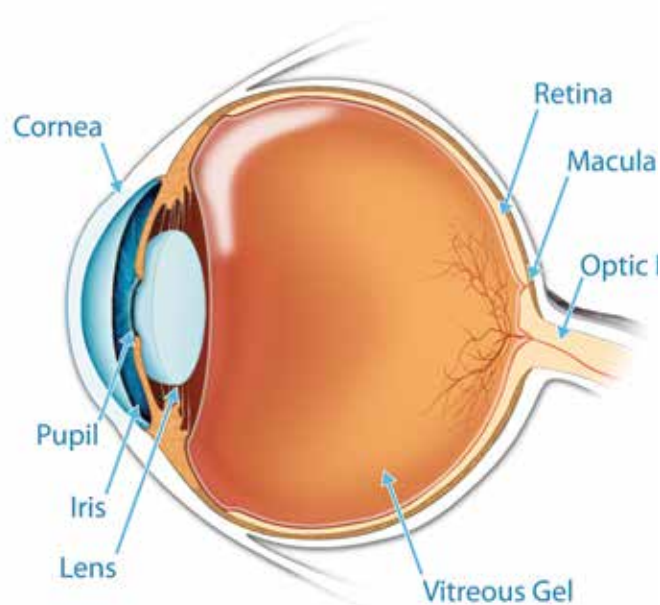
Your eyes can be affected if you have diabetes. Serious vision loss due to diabetes can be prevented with regular eye testing and early treatment. Early treatment, gets better results.

## How your eyes work

Your eye works a bit like a camera. Light enters through the front of the eye, areas called the cornea and the pupil, and passes through the lens, which focuses light on the retina. Special cells in the retina detect light, forming a focused image. The image is then sent along the optic nerve to the brain.

## How can diabetes affect my eyes?

High blood glucose levels can cause changes in the shape of the lens which can temporarily cause blurry vision. This is more likely to occur when your diabetes is not well-managed or before you are even diagnosed with diabetes. Getting appropriate treatment by seeing a doctor or health specialist can reduce blood glucose levels and your vision usually comes back to normal.



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## 3 things to do for your eyes?

1. Visit your doctor at least every 3 months for a diabetes check up. If you have diabetes, talk to your doctor or nurse about blood glucose levels and work out what your target range should be. Test your levels regularly. To manage your blood glucose levels, eat regular healthy meals, be more active, take your medication as prescribed.
2. Have your blood pressure checked every 3 months and maintain it in a healthy range.
3. Have your eyes checked every 1-2 years. You can go to an optometrist (they will usually bulk bill through Medicare). Sometimes your doctor may send you to an eye doctor (Ophthalmologist). The person checking your eyes must put drops in to dilate your eyes (open the pupils up to the light) so they can check all parts of your eye.

## What are the symptoms of diabetes related eye damage?

Often there are no obvious signs or symptoms for you to see, and everything can seem fine with your vision until the condition is quite advanced. Changes may be very slow. But serious vision loss can happen. The best plan is get regular eye testing and early treatment.

- Floaters and flashes
- Poor night vision
- Needing brighter light for reading
- Blurry vision
- Halos around lights
- Distortion in vision
- Blocked or dim vision
- Sensitivity to light

- Frequent change in eyeglass prescription
- High blood glucose levels over a period of time can increase the risk of more serious eye problems in people with diabetes, including:

## Retinopathy

- The longer you have diabetes, the greater the risk of small blood vessels at the back of the eye being damaged by high blood pressure and high blood glucose levels.
- Without early detection and treatment, diabetic retinopathy can progress. The retina can grow new blood vessels. The growth of new vessels may also lead to scar tissue development which can cause further problems such as retinal detachment: when the retina pulls away from the eye.

If you have developed retinopathy seek medical advice before doing physical activity.

## Cataracts

Changes or problems in the lens can result in clouding and decreased vision, known as cataracts. Although aging is the main risk factor, people with diabetes tend to develop cataracts more quickly and at a younger age.

## Glaucoma

There is an eye disease in which the optic nerve is damaged. It is called Glaucoma. It can affect anyone, but appears to be more common in people who have diabetes.

## Macular oedema

Blood vessels in the macula, the central area of the retina, can leak, causing swelling. This can result in central vision loss.



**"Hands on Country"**

This painting was created for Australian Diabetes Council by artist Chris Tobin, a Dharug man, and a traditional custodian in the Blue Mountains region. In the artist's words: "The central part of this painting represents the relationship of the clan – it's a unity of people looking out for each other while living independent lives."

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