



Indiana Eye Care

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Diabetes Top Cause of Blindness Among Adults

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In honor of National Diabetes Awareness Month, the Pennsylvania Optometric Association (POA) and American Optometric Association (AOA) urge Americans living with diabetes and diabetic eye disease to schedule dilated, comprehensive eye exams on a yearly basis.

According to recent studies, diabetes is responsible for eight percent of legal blindness, making it the leading cause of new cases of blindness in adults 20-74 years of age. Each year, 12,000 - 24,000 people lose their sight because of diabetes. The key to successful eye care is to monitor the disease, including vision, which is why the POA recommends those with diabetes have a dilated eye examination annually. More frequent exams may be needed if you have diabetic retinopathy, or if you notice a change in your vision.

During a dilated exam, an optometrist will look at your retina for early signs of diabetic eye disease, such as leaking blood vessels, swelling and deposits on the retina. Optometrists often serve as the first line of detection for diabetes, since the eye is the only place on the body that blood vessels can be seen without having to look through the skin.

Results from the AOA's new American Eye-Q® consumer survey showed that only 36 percent of people realize that diabetes can be detected during a comprehensive eye exam. In addition, 47 percent didn't know that a person with diabetes who does not wear corrective lenses should still receive an annual eye exam.

Diabetic retinopathy often has no early warning signs, so changes in vision may not be noticed. Therefore, early detection is critical in maintaining healthy vision.

By the year 2020, the number of people suffering from diabetic eye disease is expected to nearly double. However, monitoring and maintaining control of diabetes through regular visits to the doctor along with adherence to the doctor's instructions can lower one's risk of developing diabetic eye disease by as much as 76 percent.

Several factors influence whether someone with diabetes develops diabetic retinopathy. These include controlling blood sugar and blood pressure levels, the length of time with diabetes, race and family history.

Be sure to see an optometrist if your vision becomes blurry, if you have trouble reading, experience double vision, feel pressure in your eyes, encounter straight lines appearing wavy or if your side vision is limited.