

Diabetes and your eyes: checks and what happens next

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In short

Diabetes can damage the tiny blood vessels at the back of the eye. This is called diabetic retinopathy. It often causes no symptoms until it is well along, so regular eye checks matter even when your vision seems fine. Have a check when you are first diagnosed, then at least every 2 years, or as often as your optometrist advises.

How diabetes affects your eyes

Over time, high blood sugar can damage the blood vessels in the retina, the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye. People with diabetes also have a higher risk of cataract and glaucoma.

High blood sugar can also blur your vision for a while by changing the shape of the lens in your eye. This usually settles once your levels are back in range, so wait until then before getting new glasses.

At your diabetes eye check

1 Tell us about your diabetes.

Let us know how long you have had it, your most recent HbA1c result and the medicines you take.

2 Vision test.

We check how well you see, so it can be compared with past and future visits.

3 Retinal photos.

We take digital retinal images of the back of each eye. They are kept so changes can be compared over time.

4 Eye drops, if needed.

Drops may be used to widen your pupils for a better view. They blur your vision and make you sensitive to light for a few hours, so bring sunglasses and arrange a lift home rather than driving.

You do not need a GP referral for a diabetes eye check. Eye tests at Lynbrook Optical are bulk billed for Medicare-eligible patients. See [eye tests](#).

What happens next

- **No signs of diabetic eye disease.** Come back for your next check within 2 years, or sooner if your optometrist advises.
- **Early changes.** Your optometrist will monitor them with more frequent checks. Once diabetic eye disease is found, checks are needed at least once a year.
- **Changes that may need treatment.** You are referred to an ophthalmologist, who will talk with you about treatment options.

When changes are found, your GP is usually kept informed, as part of your diabetes care team. How often you need checks can also differ for people with type 1 diabetes, children and during pregnancy. Your optometrist will tell you what applies to you.

Between checks

- Keep your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol as close to your targets as you can.
- Take your medicines as your doctor advises.
- If you smoke, ask your GP for support to stop.
- Stay active and eat well.
- Sign up for free eye check reminders with KeepSight, the national diabetes eye check program, at keepsight.org.au.

When to call us on (03) 9702 9118

Call us, whether or not you have been told you have diabetic eye disease, if you notice:

- Blurred, distorted or dim vision
- Dark spots or gaps in your vision
- Your glasses prescription seems to keep changing
- Any other change in your vision

Call (03) 9702 9118

⚠ Go to the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital emergency department (32 Gisborne Street, East Melbourne, open 24 hours), or call 000, if you have

a sudden loss of vision, a sudden shower of new floaters, repeated flashes of light, or severe eye pain.

To book a diabetes eye check, book online or call us on (03) 9702 9118.

FAQs

— How often should I have my eyes checked if I have diabetes?

When you are first diagnosed, then at least every 2 years. Once diabetic eye disease is found, at least once a year, or as often as your optometrist advises.

— Do I need a referral for a diabetes eye check?

No. You can book directly with an optometrist. Tell us you have diabetes when you book.

— **My vision is fine. Do I still need a check?**

Yes. Diabetic retinopathy often causes no symptoms until it is well along. The early signs can only be seen in an eye examination.

— **Why is my vision blurry when my blood sugar is high?**

High blood sugar can change the shape of the lens in your eye for a while. It usually settles when your levels are back in range, so wait until then before getting new glasses.
