

## Annual eye exam is vital if you have diabetes

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(HealthDay)—A yearly eye exam is a key part of diabetes treatment, experts say.

Diabetic eye disease is the leading cause of blindness among people aged 40 to 60, cautioned Dr. Malav Joshi, an ophthalmologist at the Krieger Eye Institute in Baltimore.

And the longer people have [diabetes](#), the greater the odds of developing [vision problems](#).

However, "[diabetic eye disease](#) is preventable, and you can take steps to slow it down or even reverse it by taking care of your diabetes, your blood pressure and your cholesterol," Joshi said in a LifeBridge Health news release.

A dilated eye exam can help doctors spot problems early on—before vision loss. This is particularly important since eye damage related to diabetes may not cause symptoms right away.

The eye conditions associated with diabetes include:

- **Diabetic retinopathy:** In the early states, this causes the [blood vessels](#) to weaken, leak or bleed into the retina. Later, bleeding blood vessels can cause serious vision problems.
- **Diabetic macular edema:** This occurs when fluid or cholesterol leaks out of the blood vessels, causing the part of the retina essential for fine vision to swell.
- **Glaucoma:** This affects the optic nerve and can lead to permanent blindness without early detection and treatment.
- **Cataracts:** People with diabetes are at much greater risk for cataracts, which occur when the lens becomes cloudy.

During a dilated eye exam, doctors can look at the inside of the eye for signs of trouble, such as [abnormal blood vessels](#), retinal swelling and nerve tissue damage. "It also helps us see your cataracts a little better," Joshi said.

Other steps you can take to protect your vision if you have diabetes:

- Stop smoking,
- Follow a healthy diet,
- Exercise regularly,
- Take all medication as directed.

**More information:** The U.S. National Eye Institute provides more on [dilated eye exams](#).

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