

# Diabetic Eye Disease

## WHAT IS DIABETIC EYE DISEASE?

Diabetic eye disease is a group of eye conditions that affects people with diabetes:

**Diabetic retinopathy** – A leading cause of blindness in American adults, it is caused by damage to the small blood vessels of the retina – the seeing layer of the eye.

**Diabetic macular edema (DME)** – A complication of diabetes caused by leaking blood vessels, which leads to fluid accumulation in the macula, the center of the retina used for central vision. DME can cause central vision to become blurry.

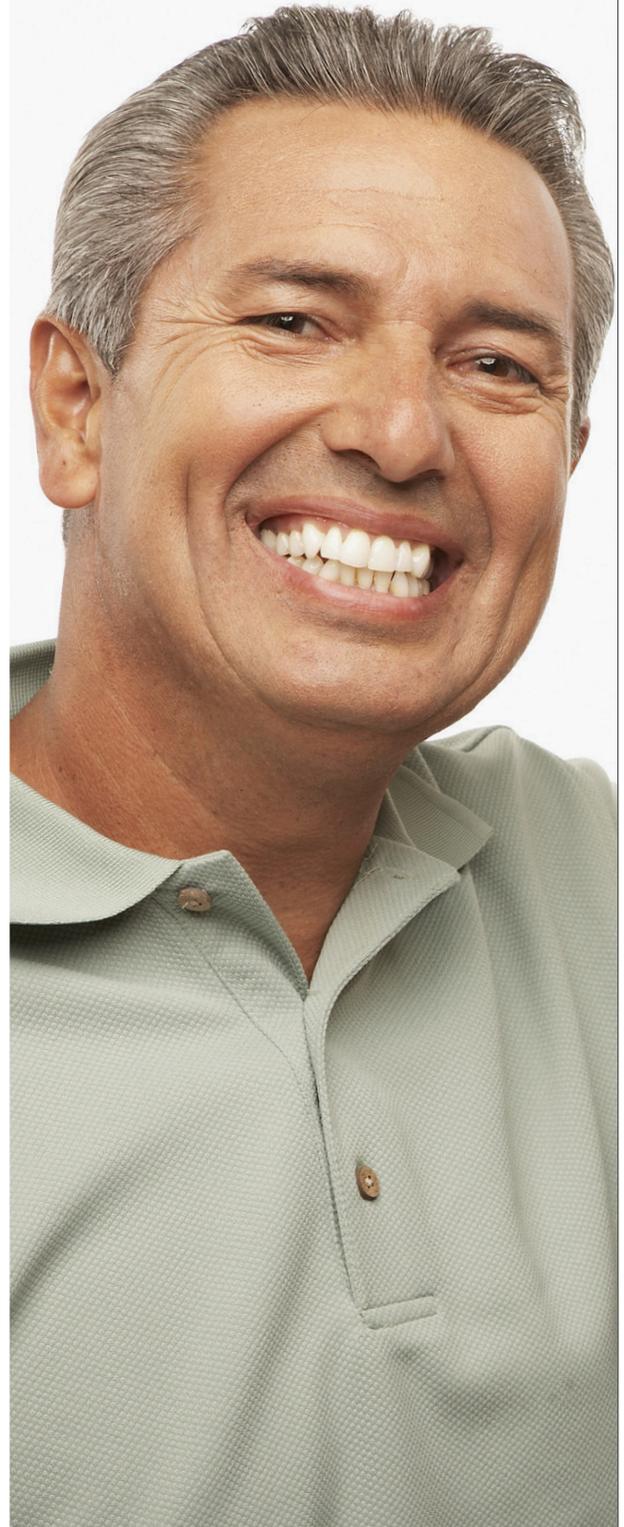
**Cataract** – The clouding of the lens in the eye, which blocks or changes the passage of light into the eye. Cataracts can cause vision to become blurry.

**Glaucoma** – Optic nerve damage and possible loss of side vision, usually caused by increase in fluid pressure inside the eye.

## HOW TO PREVENT DIABETIC EYE DISEASE?

- Maintaining good blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol control.
- Getting a comprehensive dilated eye exam and/or obtaining retinal photographs that are examined by an eye doctor, at least once a year, or more often as recommended by the eye doctor.
- Pregnant woman with diabetes prior to pregnancy should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam early in their pregnancy. The eye doctor may recommend additional exams during pregnancy.
- Keeping a healthy lifestyle that includes exercising regularly, not smoking and following a healthy diet. Talk to a dietician about your eating habits and a doctor before starting an exercise program.

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## WHAT IS DIABETES?

Diabetes is a chronic condition that occurs when blood sugar levels are constantly high that can cause serious health complications, including heart disease, kidney failure, nerve damage, and blindness. Individuals with diabetes can reduce the risk of these side effects by taking care of their diabetes through diet, exercise, and if necessary, by medications.

More than 29 million Americans have diabetes. Considered as a chronic disease epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence of diabetes has increased dramatically over the past forty years.

All people with diabetes are at risk of developing eye disease that can permanently damage their vision and even lead to blindness. In fact, individuals with untreated diabetes are 25 times more likely to lose their sight than the general population.

## WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF DIABETES?

**Type 1 diabetes (previously known as Juvenile Onset):** This form of diabetes is usually diagnosed in children. It occurs when the pancreas is unable to produce insulin – a hormone that regulates blood sugar levels.

**Type 2 diabetes (previously known as Adult Onset):** The most common form, type 2 diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar levels, or when the body does not effectively use the insulin that the body does produce. Type II diabetes usually develops in adulthood, although there is a rise in the number of children are being diagnosed.

Race and family history influence the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are more likely to develop diabetes, especially if they are overweight. Those with a family history of diabetes are more likely to develop diabetes.

Both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are serious diseases, and can lead to similar complications, including diabetic eye disease. People with diabetes can take several steps to stay well. Most important are eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, maintaining good control of blood sugar levels, and learning as much as possible about living with diabetes.

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