

Diabetes & You

Diabetes And Eye Health: A Closer Look

(NAPSA)—Those with diabetes should take a good look at their eye health.

That's the word from the American Diabetes Association. It reports that nearly 26 million people in the United States have diabetes and 12,000–24,000 people lose their sight because of the disease each year.

The American Optometric Association (AOA) encourages Americans with diabetes to schedule annual, dilated eye examinations to help detect and prevent eye and vision disorders that could lead to blindness.

Diabetic Eye Disorders

People with diabetes are at a significantly higher risk for developing eye diseases including glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy, one of the most serious sight-threatening complications of diabetes. Consider the following:

- Those with diabetes are 40 percent more likely to suffer from glaucoma than people without diabetes.

- Those with diabetes are 60 percent more likely to develop cataracts. People with diabetes also tend to get them at a younger age and have them progress faster. With cataracts, the eye's clear lens clouds, blocking light and interfering with normal vision.

- Diabetic retinopathy is a condition that causes progressive damage to the retina, the light-sensitive lining at the back of the eye. Damage to the tiny blood vessels that nourish the retina causes swelling of retinal tissue and clouding of vision. If left untreated, diabetic retinopathy can cause blindness.

Since early warning signs of diabetic eye and vision disorders are often subtle or undetected, the AOA recommends that people—especially African Americans and His-



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panics, who have a higher risk of developing diabetes—look for initial signs and contact a doctor of optometry if any of the following symptoms are present: sudden blurred or double vision, trouble reading or focusing on near-work, eye pain or pressure, a noticeable aura or dark ring around lights or illuminated objects, visible dark spots in vision or images of flashing lights.

Eye Health Tips

In addition to having yearly, comprehensive eye exams, the AOA offers the following tips to help prevent or slow the development of diabetic eye diseases:

- Take prescribed medication as directed.

- Keep glycohemoglobin test results ("A1c," or average blood sugar level) consistently under 7 percent.

- Stick to a healthy diet that includes omega-3s, fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Exercise regularly.

- Control high blood pressure.

- Avoid alcohol and smoking.

For more information on eye health, visit www.aoa.org.